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LECTURES

ON THE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

WITH AN APPENDIX,

IN CONTINUATION OF THE INSPIRED HISTORY, BY
A SKETCH OF THE REVELATION.

BY

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P R E F A C E.

THE Acts of the Apostles, like other sacred books, has received its title, not from the writer, but from the early Christians, for the sake of convenient reference. The prevailing designation, if not unexceptionable, is, perhaps, the best that can be devised; for though the book is far from recording all the acts of all the apostles, the former half applies to the twelve; and the latter, to the labours of one who was added to their number, that, through him, the kingdom of God might pass to the Gentiles. Under its present title, this book is mentioned by the first of the Latin fathers, Tertullian, in his appeal to Marcion:—"Certe Acta Apostolorum hunc mihi ordinem Pauli tradiderunt, a te quoque non negandum."—Adv. Marc., lib. v., cap. 1. "It certainly cannot be denied, even by yourself, that the Acts of the Apostles have handed down to me this succession of

Paul." To the earlier testimonies of Justin Martyr, Origen, and Irenæus, might be added those of the more celebrated fathers, Chrysostom, Augustine, and Jerome.

The opinion of the highest antiquity, that Luke was the writer of the Acts, is confirmed by internal evidence, which exhibits here a second part of the history which begins with Luke's Gospel.

That this narrative of the earliest days of the Christian church was divinely inspired, we may leave to be proved by the commentator on the Gospel according to Luke ; for, as one hand wrote the two parts, so it is evident that one Supreme Mind presided over the whole. The inspiration is, however, involved in the scope of the Acts. For this book holds the same relation to the Christian religion, as the inspired history of Israel to the Mosaic revelation. He who gave to his chosen people the statutes which were to be their law in the promised land, deemed it necessary to record their entrance and their history there ; for how could we understand the Psalms and the prophets without the Mosaic history ? Nor can we suppose that the Mind which gave us a fourfold history of Jesus Christ, would leave us destitute of all Divine information concerning the erection of that church of which Christ is the foundation. For how could we understand the Epistles, without the Acts of the Apostles ? This book, being the golden link that connects the life of our Lord with that new form of revelation, the Epistles, which constitute so large a part of the Christian Scrip-

tures, we may consider this as, at once, its certain scope, and a convincing evidence that its origin is, equally with that of the Epistles, Divine.

But the Acts, like Christianity (its theme), is its own witness. None can bring to the study of the book the requisite intellectual and moral qualities, without perceiving that it was written, about the time of which it speaks, by a sincere man, of good sense, in an excellent spirit, and so absorbed in his subject as to be lost to all selfish aims; keeping the writer out of sight, except where fidelity distinguished between those narratives in which he was not an actor, and those in which he could say, "*we*." That the historian was raised above the infirmities of human nature is clear; for here there are none of them, even in circumstances in which they would otherwise have been sure to be betrayed. He who hid himself behind the Lord whose history he wrote, equally sinks the historian in the theme of the Acts, which is, the apostolic labours that reared the Christian church.

The harmony between the Acts and the Epistles has been very happily displayed in the "*Horæ Paulinæ*" of Paley; who shows, that it outrages all probability to suppose either the one or the other to have been a deceptive fabrication.

The place which the Acts occupies in the New Testament is appropriate to its design, of introducing the Epistles, most of which were written by Paul, with whose history the book of the Acts is brought to a close that seems somewhat abrupt. But we may still

ask, Why must there be but one scope, or design? The kingdom of God is here shown to be taken from the Jews, and given to us Gentiles, to "bring forth the fruits thereof," in fulfilment of Christ's warning to "his own people, who received him not." The order of the Christian church, while under the inspired apostles, is here placed on record, for the guidance of every future age.

The author of "Lectures on the History and the Preaching of Christ," has been encouraged to close the Christian history by this volume, on which he may be permitted to make some introductory remarks for the reader's guidance.

First. To avoid all undue bias, it should be our method, in all such expositions, to commence by translating the original as literally as possible. For though the most literal, is not always the most faithful, version, it frequently has advantages which the more elegant translation must lose. A version which would have been inadmissible, if published by itself, has, therefore, been suffered here to remain, as wrought into the narrative, and made the basis of the comment. The charm of the Peshito Syriac lies very much in that kind of simple fidelity which scholars might deem a fault. There is no book of the New Testament which demands more imperatively than the Acts, an appeal from our authorised version to the Greek. For the ignorance or prejudices of our translators, and the commands of their conceited king, have combined to corrupt, in a peculiar manner, this portion of the Word of God.

Secondly. It has been the aim of the writer to keep constantly in view the genius of the Acts, which is historical. If God has varied his revelation, why should we confound all distinctions by a sameness of exposition? Let the Epistles teach us Christian doctrine, and the Acts make us acquainted with ecclesiastical history. It had been easy and pleasant to indulge in theological reflections, where Luke has confined himself to facts; but he who makes us better acquainted with the inspired history of the church, is the real expositor of the Acts.

It may, however, be asked, why expound this book at all? Is it not a narrative sufficiently plain? Are we not, by such attempts, labouring to paint the diamond, or perfume the rose? The Acts were, indeed, intelligible enough to those to whom Luke immediately wrote; but lapse of time, and change of circumstances, have given occasion to obscurities which require an interpreter. Due diligence would, even now, make the mere reading of Scripture more useful than it usually is; but expository lectures have, at least, this advantage, that they lead to a more thoughtful and profitable reading of the Divine Word. For these Lectures I would ask, that each one may be followed, as well as preceded, by the reading of the correspondent portion of the New Testament.

The Appendix to this volume, which is a sequel to the same writer's "Lectures on the History of Christ," attempts, by aid of the Revelation, to complete the inspired history of the church to the end of time.

Of the chronology of the Acts, the following Lectures may be thought negligent; but so is Luke; and as it is impossible to be sure of the exact dates, the reader is left to those in the margin of our Bibles, which are as nearly right as, perhaps, any that have been framed, from Capel, down to our day.

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History of Paul and the church after the close of the Acts.

LECTURE I.

MATTHIAS CHOSEN TO BE APOSTLE INSTEAD OF JUDAS.

ACTS i.

IF it is natural for one of its earliest propagators to commence the history of a new religion, this is perilous for impostors, and safe, only to the sincere. For even craft becomes dangerous here, while frankness is desperate. The caution and concealment which falsehood requires, destroying our confidence, lead to the detection they were intended to prevent; while the attempt to escape by an air of negligence may not only betray secrets, but, being artificial, cannot supply the place of sincerity and truth.

The propagator of the new faith, being at the same time its historian, becomes part of the religion itself, and is an incarnation of that which professes to be divine. Had one of the generals of Mohamed written a portion of the Koran, to record its propagation by the sword, he might have displayed his military genius, which is unhappily common enough in a world mad upon war; but it is another affair to record the victory of truth, benevolence, and sanctity, where the writer must himself exhibit these qualities, or confute his own tale. With a mind awake to such reflections, and a heart lifted up to the Father of lights, and the God of truth and grace, let us enter on the earliest history of the Christian church, written by one of its first members and ministers, the evangelist Luke.

Acts i.—“*The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until,*” &c.—to the end of the chapter.

Next to the history of Christ, the head; that of “the church, which is his body,” is most necessary to be known, in order to understand the rest of the New Testament. As, therefore, the religion of Jesus elevates us from the selfishness of our fallen nature to the expansive benevolence and public spirit which he displayed; the history of Christianity, deeply interesting its disciples, has called forth the talents of Christian writers in every age, and afforded instruction and delight to devout inquiring minds. The imperfections of ordinary ecclesiastical history are, however, so notorious, that we are taught to set the higher value on that which is given by inspiration of God.

Of Christ himself we have four such histories, called the Gospels by emphasis, on which I have already lectured;* but of the Church which he founded we have only one, remarkably corroborated, however, by the Epistles; and to this one I now invite the more anxious attention, that we may the better understand those inspired letters to which it is a golden key.

To prepare the minds of his disciples, and reconcile them to his departure, our Lord had said, “If a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” The Gospels recorded his rejection and crucifixion, which the enemies thought the death of his cause; we have now to behold the abundant fruit brought forth.

“Luke, the beloved physician,” having composed “a former book,” or treatise, to make known to Theophilus our Lord Jesus, as he *began* the series of miraculous doings and divine teachings on which our faith rests, here presents to the same disciple, a second part of the grand whole, the history of what the apostles went on to do and teach, as far as it was essential to the understanding of the epistles, the new form of revelation which was to constitute the greater part of the New Testament. Luke’s first sentence is a connecting link, which goes back into the theme of the Gospels and forward into that of the Acts. For, “until the day in which he was taken up, the Lord Jesus was engaged in teaching the apostles, whom by the Holy Spirit he had chosen,” the order

* Lectures on the History of Christ, (2 vols., second edition,) and on Christ’s Preaching, one vol.

of that kingdom which they were to erect. As their testimony to his resurrection was to act an important part, we are reminded that "he had shown himself to them alive, after having suffered death," which should not be expressed by the technical and equivocal phrase, "his passion;" for the Scriptures, far from "darkening counsel" by mystic terms, bring down heaven to earth, by teaching the most important truths in the simplest forms. The grand fact was proved "by many decisive evidences" "during the forty days that he was seen by them, and was speaking concerning the kingdom of God," which he sent them to set up. For this *they* were to live and labour; as his discourse showed that, for this, *He* lived and died, and rose and reigned.

Instead of "being assembled," the Syriac and Vulgate, with several fathers, seem to adopt a different reading, "eating with them;" for their assembling on the Mount of Olives is narrated in the sixth verse. Our Redeemer "charged them not to quit Jerusalem" through disgust, or fear, or despair of benefiting those who had killed him; but "to wait there for the promise of the Father, which you heard from me." For thus abruptly, it should be known, the style of Scripture often passes from the historic to the dramatic form, without the words "saith he," which our translators have, not without reason, here supplied in italics. The manner in which our Lord mentions *the* promise of the Father, shows the importance attached to the descent of the Spirit, as not only made the theme of Christ's last conversation, but also promised in that prophecy of Joel, which Peter said was fulfilled at Pentecost. But when he adds, "which you heard from me," he teaches us that what we have once heard from him we should never forget, and that he expected, and we should expect, all his promises to be fulfilled to us when he had left the earth. Luke, whose Gospel often throws light on the Acts, its sequel, had recorded the words of Christ's forerunner: "I baptize with water, but he that comes after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire," Luke iii. 16.

That they were to wait for this, "*not* many days," was a welcome assurance to them who knew the value and efficacy of the Spirit which Christ had already imparted to them, and who might have been driven, by fear of a tedious delay at Jerusalem, or drawn by a benevolent desire of usefulness elsewhere, to cry, "Lord, how long?" That they much needed the fulfilment of

the grand promise, to supply their deficiencies and correct their mistakes, we see by what follows.

For the apostles, when finally assembled to witness the ascension, asked, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" alluding, perhaps, to the prophecy, Daniel vii. 27: "The kingdom shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." That they remembered the thrones on which their Lord promised they should sit, may have been one reason for the check which his answer contains. They believed that their Lord could give the kingdom when he pleased, and that Israel was to be the seat and centre of that empire, whether more or less temporal or spiritual; but they knew not how to expect that when the nation had rejected and murdered him he would raise Israel, from the present state of vassalage, to universal empire. Our Lord rebukes this meddling with times and fit seasons for events, which belong to the sovereign authority of our Father. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; so that, when times are foretold, they are scarcely to be understood till explained by the events. But when the Saviour said, "Ye shall receive the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon you and, you shall be witnesses to me," he promised an invigorating influence which would fortify their spirits for a task far different from that dominion of which, perhaps, they dreamed. Witness-bearing was to be the business of their lives, to put the world in possession of that knowledge of the Saviour which was their treasure, though the witnesses should be martyrs also, as the word signifies, brow-beaten and persecuted, even unto death. The order in which their testimony should be spread was pointed out, to which the event exactly answered; for, "beginning at Jerusalem," they extended it through Judea and Samaria; but their narrow minds are taught the cosmopolite genius of our religion, which must embrace "the uttermost parts of the earth."

If, entranced by these prospects, they indulge in golden dreams, they are waked up to reality, by discovering that the body of their Lord was unusually elevated, and that, as his head rose above them, his feet had left the ground. While they were looking and wondering, a cloud came under him and snatched him completely from their sight; but whether he first rose to the ordinary height of the clouds, we know not. Amidst divine discourse,

they lose the speaker. But as they naturally continued looking, after there was nothing but clouds to be seen, they found, standing by them, two who were not there before; and who looked, indeed, like men, but were clothed in white, as Peter, James, and John had seen their Lord on Mount Tabor, when, amidst celestial visitors, "his raiment was white as the light, as no fuller on earth could white them." The two strangers addressing the apostles familiarly, as men of Galilee, demanded, somewhat authoritatively, "Why have ye stood looking up into heaven," as if surprised and disappointed that Jesus was gone, or despairing of his ever coming again? "he will come, and in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven;" recalling to their memory, perhaps, some of their Lord's predictions of his second coming; that they, assured he had not cast off all concern for a world which had so ungratefully treated him, might not stay there gazing, but go, as he bade them, to Jerusalem, and prepare mankind to meet him. A part of the celestial *cortège*, sent down to accompany our Lord to the skies, is by him ordered back, to teach the church on earth henceforth to look for him in the clouds of heaven, to summon all nations to his bar. Thus far Luke has made the concluding theme of his Gospel, Christ's ascension, introductory to the Acts, and the history of the Church, our proper theme, on which we now enter, by considering the disciples' return to Jerusalem, and the filling up of the vacancy in the apostolic college.

I. THE DISCIPLES' RETURN TO JERUSALEM. Ver. 12—14.

As evangelist, Luke had said, our Lord "led them out as far as Bethany, where he was parted from them;" but this was on the mount called Olivet, or the Oliveyard, from the olive-trees which formerly grew there in great numbers. The distance from Jerusalem is said to be a "Sabbath-day's journey;" not that this was the Sabbath, for it was Thursday; nor that Moses had limited a journey on the Sabbath; but the Rabbins derived the rule, from the prohibition to depart, on the sacred day, from the camp, which was supposed to be two miles square. The Syriac makes the distance from Jerusalem seven stadia; but two miles is the estimated space. From that part of the mount, where, ceasing to be called Bethphage, it took, from the village, the name of Bethany, our Lord seems to have quitted the earth.

See the troop, which had gone forth with their Saviour at their head, return—without him, shall I say? No; he was “with them always.” The heaven of heavens, however, having received his body, we now see something like a returning funeral procession, which has left behind it what was all-important in the estimation of the company when they went out. Another last glance the disciples dart towards heaven, which has become so much richer, and then give a downcast look to earth, that is left so much poorer; till, at length, they find themselves entering the east gate of the city which they were forbidden to quit, and walking up those streets which they had just before looked up, from amidst the olive-trees on the mount. The crowded city seems solitary, for want of him who was to them more than all the world. The return from the mount of ascension, to the city of the crucifixion, had it not been for the promise of the Father, would have been like turning from the gates of heaven to the antechamber of hell. Slow and solemn were their steps from the spot where the Lord became at once glorious and invisible, the attraction of heaven snatching him away from earth; and what must have been their reflections as they tread the streets stained with the blood of Him that had been led about there in cruel mockery and scorn, “his face marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men”? Jerusalem might have appeared to them an accursed city, had they not been spectators of the ascension, and commanded to wait there for blessings, and there to preach repentance and forgiveness. Let us now observe what is said of their place, their company, and their employment, on their return.

1. *Their place.* “When they were come into the city, they went up to an upper room.” From the very texts adduced by some to show that this was in the temple, I conclude that it was not. For if we frequently read that they assembled in the temple, had this been the case in the first instance, should we not have been told so? The ecclesiastical authorities were too hostile to suffer the disciples of Jesus to take up their abode in the chambers of the temple, appropriated to the persons or things connected with its worship. But as the apostles were men of Galilee, not inhabitants of Jerusalem, I suppose that this upper room was that in which our Lord ate his last paschal supper, and which, from his manner of pointing it out, seems to have

belonged to a disciple. The Jews had such an upper room for their devotions, as we read of Peter going up to one, for prayer ; and of Paul holding, in an upper room, a meeting of the church at Miletus. In the houses of Jerusalem such apartments were provided for those who came up to keep the feasts. Our Lord described that in which he instituted the sacred supper, as “ a large upper room furnished ;” but what was large for thirteen persons, might be too small for one hundred and twenty, who were now assembled. Yet, the upper room, strictly so called, opened upon the flat roof of the house, and thus might be indefinitely extended. Of the persons here enumerated it is said, “ they abode” there ; which may, however, mean no more than that they spent there the day ; though they may have retired to separate lodgings at night.

What reflections must have rushed into the minds of the apostles, on coming up into the room where they had celebrated the last supper ! How much better they now understood our Lord’s discourse than when they heard it ! How soothing must have been the remembrance of his prayer : “ Now I am no more in world ; but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me !” After seeing him make the clouds his chariot of ascension to the throne of heaven, what must they have thought of the condescension they had witnessed in the room where he washed the disciples’ feet ! From that door Judas rushed forth at the word, “ What thou doest, do quickly ;” and when Judas was gone out, Jesus said, “ Now is the Son of Man glorified.” In that room, after a few days, descended the Spirit, of which Jesus said not in vain, “ He shall glorify me.”

2. *Survey the company.* As if to show how important it is for us to know who the apostles were, Luke, after giving the list in the Gospel, here repeats it ; except that now there were but eleven names. “ The women” that are added seem to be those who came up with our Lord “ from Galilee, and who ministered to him of their substance.” But there is one that must not thus be passed over, especially as this is the last time we shall meet with her in Scripture—“ Mary, the mother of Jesus ;” not of God, as she has been impiously called. Is this all that the inspired history of the church says of her whom “ all generations shall call blessed” ? Then verily the Scriptures are not

chargeable with the Mariolatry, the worship of Mary, which has so long and so extensively fixed the blot of idolatry on what was called the Christian church ! As she is never again mentioned, we might conclude that she was soon taken from the house of the beloved disciple, to whom our Lord, from the cross, commended her, up to his heavenly abode ; but on this subject, ignorance is wisdom. By "the brethren" of Christ being there, we conclude that it could no longer be said, "neither did they believe on him." "The number of the names," or persons, here assembled, "a hundred and twenty," was probably made up of the eleven apostles, perhaps also the seventy evangelists ; the women ; some inhabitants of Jerusalem, who, like the master of the house, believed, and such persons as Joseph of Arimathea, disciples who were in some way connected with the capital city. This upper room was the cradle of the Christian church, now an infant, but soon to become a giant and stride over a conquered world. For those apostles shall found an empire that shall know neither bounds nor end ; and their names will be inscribed on the foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem. Who then would "despise the day of small things" ?

3. *Their employment is thus described* : "These all continued harmoniously in prayer and supplication." Their harmony was secured by the discourses which they had heard and the scenes they had witnessed, which had extinguished self, that fire-brand of discord. With a world ready to rise in arms against them, their strength lay in union ; and now that the traitor, the discordant one, was gone, we may say, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity !"

They were commanded to wait, but not to be idle ; and their business was prayer for that Spirit who was to fit them for their work. They knew that the Lord had spent forty days in deep devotions, ere he came forth in the power of the Spirit ; and they might have expected a still longer preparation for their great work, had they not been told they should not wait many days. They came from this retirement, to live in the view of a world, eyed by enemies as the butt of persecution, and by friends as examples and guides. Not the least of the blessings which resulted from these days of prayer, was the lesson given to public men, to prepare for great doings by secret devotions.

They who were shut up with God came forth to move the world. As, however, prayer is not to supersede, but to inspire and to sanctify exertion, we turn to contemplate—

II. THE FIRST IMPORTANT ACT OF THE APOSTOLIC COMPANY.

In those days of devotional waiting, "Peter stood up;" for though Christ had committed to him the keys to open affairs, and had restored him after his fall, he rose and respectfully addressed his brethren; while we are informed that our Lord sat to teach, and spake, not as to brethren, but said, "Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am." Listen we then to—

1. *The advice of Peter, to fill up the vacancy in their number.* The first part of his address, being retrospective, belongs rather to the Gospels; but we should mark, that the "Holy Ghost spake by the mouth of David," which shows the personality of the Holy Spirit, and the inspiration of the Psalms, which Christ had already observed must be fulfilled, when they said, "He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me." Unhappy Judas! he, knowing how to guide those who took Jesus, to the place where they would find him at prayer, went from eating with him as a friend, to betray him to his foes! But what am I doing? Departing from the pattern set before me! For what could be said of the man and the deed, more unimpassioned, than that "Judas was guide to them who took Jesus"? Even our word "traitor" goes beyond the original, which merely signifies one that delivers up, a phrase that may have a good as well as a bad sense. Can we doubt that the sacred writers gave, not private interpretations; but "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"? A thousand years had elapsed since David spake, as same writers aver, by poetic inspiration; but the Scripture must needs be fulfilled; for the Psalmist said, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me;" and Judas at last did the deed.

To the rest of the apostles it was an humbling reflection, that they must say, "he was numbered with us," to make up the twelve, and that the ministry to which they were called fell also to his lot. But no office, however sacred or exalted, can exempt us from the necessity of saying, "Lord, who is it that

betrayeth thee? Is it I?" Ye that surround the Lord's table should remember, that there it was said, "One of you shall betray me," and he who ministers there should reflect that Christ spake thus to apostles. That "this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity," as a man builds a house, when his money defrays the expense, we know; for Judas "brought back the thirty pieces, and the chief priests bought with them the Potter's field;" though some have supposed that as "he was a thief and kept the bag," he had pilfered from it what contributed to the purchase, for which he bargained, as soon as he received the price of the treason, and that the priests did but complete the purchase for which they found he had negotiated. But some, though with a different design, seeking a knot in a rush, have made it a great difficulty to reconcile what Luke here says of the falling of Judas on his face, with the words "he went and hanged himself." As if Matthew intended to exhibit the traitor hanging there for ever, when we know that the Jews were taught, by their law, to entertain a horror of a body hanging all night! There is, therefore, no occasion even for the supposition that the rope, or the branch, by which he hung himself, broke; for if he were, with the contempt, or horror, that would be natural, cut down in violent haste, the body, in that hot climate, beginning to swell and decompose, might "burst asunder and all his bowels gush out." A late commentator, wishing to make "the son of perdition" an heir of salvation, has *borrowed* a foolish criticism, to prove that Judas was merely choked with grief for what he had done, though it is undeniable that the language of the evangelist is that by which the Greeks express hanging, which produces death by choking.

Who can wonder that such a criminal was left to imitate his prototype Ahithophel, and was made a horrible spectacle? "For this was known to all the dwellers at Jerusalem;" and the new cemetery for strangers, bought with the blood-money, was called Aceldama; the first half of this Syriac word signifying a field, and the last, blood. But Luke's expression, "*their* proper tongue," shows that what was then spoken at Jerusalem was not his own tongue, nor Hebrew, nor that of Theophilus, to whom he wrote, who seems to have been of Italy; for the historian shows by his style that he was educated as a Greek. The words of

Peter intimate that the field took its name from the awful end of the traitor there ; nor is it improbable, that if he previously bargained for it, he should go to see it, and there commit suicide ; and that the spot which had been deteriorated by the potters, becoming infamous by his death and burial there, was purchased at so low a price as thirty pieces of silver. Field of blood ! we quit thy horrid precincts, exclaiming, “ See what comes of preferring silver to the Saviour ! He that sells his salvation, buys his perdition ! ”

This retrospect Peter employs as introductory to the prospective part of his address, quoting Ps. lxix. 25, but exchanging the plural for the singular ; for Judas, by throwing himself into the enemies’ camp, incurred the judgments threatened to those whose habitation soon became desolate, and the field purchased by his bribe was left to be the abode of the dead. From this Psalm, which is applied more than once to the state of things between Christ and his enemies, Peter turns to quote the cix. v. 8, “ his office let another take.” Our translators have departed from their own version of the Old Testament, which contains the word office, and which, in a quotation, ought to have been carefully preserved, to follow the Vulgate version of the church of Rome, “ his bishoprick let another take ; ” though it would be as ridiculous to translate the פקדונו of the Psalmist, *bishopric*, as it would be to suppose that the seventy Greek translators meant a bishopric, by ἐπισκοπή, which Luke here quotes. The Syriac translates the word by one that signifies ministry. Bishops were not yet appointed, and when they were, apostles are never called bishops ; but if this “ handling of the word of God deceitfully ” was perpetrated to make bishops successors to the apostles, no other connecting link could be found than Judas Iscariot.

Peter advises that one should be chosen to the apostolic office from among those who had been with our Lord “ from the baptism of John ; ” for Christ had said to the twelve, “ You shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.” But the new apostle was to be one who continued with them till the day of the ascension, for “ many went back and walked no more with Jesus.” When Paul was called to be an apostle, he was permitted “ to see that Just One,” and to hear from his lips all that was necessary—for apostles were

to be eye and ear witnesses. It is again painful to observe a tampering with the Word of God, by introducing into our translation the word *ordain*, without anything in the original to authorise it; for the apostle simply says, it is necessary for one of these to be a witness of Christ's resurrection. We are now to observe,

2. *The correspondent conduct of the whole body of the faithful.* They employed their own judgment as far as it would go. For "they placed" apart "two," though only one was to be chosen. These two stood out prominently from the rest; but neither of them appeared preferable to the other, which was, perhaps, overruled to introduce the Divine decision. Joseph—usually called Barsabas, but surnamed Justus, probably by the Romans, who had marked his rectitude, as this was *their* word for the just—and Matthias were both deemed worthy to be apostles, though we have never heard of their distinction before. How many of exalted worth, loved and prized by the church in their day, have passed away, leaving no name but that which is written in heaven! Gather us, Lord, to make the acquaintance and enjoy the friendship of "the excellent of the earth, in whom is all thy delight." The selection of the most suitable persons, by the whole congregation of the faithful, is here introduced into the church by the apostles themselves, in the most important of all cases, the election of him that was to complete the twelve. From the time that this most rational mode of election was exchanged for priestly authority, political influence, or filthy lucre, there have been, instead of faithful pastors, "grievous wolves, not sparing the flock." What a contrast between this first election, under the guidance of Peter, and the doings of a conclave of Cardinals, pretending to choose his successor, after a mass of the Holy Ghost, which had been made a solemn mockery by the previous dictation of an emperor!

The body of disciples appealed to our Lord to decide where *they* could not. They prayed—by whose lips we are not told—"Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all, show whom thou hast chosen, of these two, one;" for in this order Griesbach gives the words. Is not this addressed to Christ, whom Peter had owned as knowing all things? We have just read of "the apostles whom he had chosen," and he is here said to

have now chosen one, though the rest, not knowing, asked him to show who it was. The appeal to Christ's knowledge of the heart intimates that he would choose none whose heart was not right, to take this *ministry* and *apostolate*—by the former word expressing ministration in general; and by the latter, itineracy through the world; as an apostle signifies one who is sent forth as an agent on distant expeditions. From both these Judas revolted, for the church of Christ knows no official sanctity that supersedes the necessity of a heart right with God. To what the transgressor fell is but hinted by the words, "that he might go to his own place," as if he were out of his place among apostles. Why, then, was he chosen by Christ himself? To reply in Christ's words, "That the Scripture might be fulfilled," is not sufficient; for, in that respect, he might be said to have been in his place for the sake of the fulfilment. But Christ acted towards him according to his profession and apparent character, which was so fair that it would have justified us in choosing him; and thus we are taught that we are not accountable for events when we have acted aright. In the higher sense, Christ speaks of Judas as not chosen by him who searches the heart; but as distinguished from the rest, "a devil," one for whom "it had been good not to have been born." Who can view without horror a *ci-devant* apostle adjudged to take his place with those who say, "Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?" and to whom he will say, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." We tremble and turn giddy at the sight of a such a fall. From what a height!—the apostolate! To what a depth!—his own place! For what must that place be?

Let not the first prayer known to have been offered in the apostolic church pass without notice. How brief! how simple! how rational! how complete! Here is no pomp of words, no accumulation of unmeaning or misapplied epithets, no musical rhythm to cheat the heart by the ear, and substitute singing for prayer. Christ is addressed as searcher of hearts, when requested to show whom he had chosen to an office which demanded a heart devoted to his glory. Call this a tale of fanaticism or imposture! It is full of the marks of rationality and sincerity. Let us learn from this first example what the prayers of the church should be—the utterance of the heart,

addressed to the Searcher of hearts, who, being a spirit, must be worshipped in spirit and in truth—an extemporaneous adaptation of the prayer to the occasion.

3. *The answer was given by the decision of the lot.* Let not this surprise you, for God introduced the lot into the Jewish worship; where it decided between two victims, which should be offered to him; and he divided the land to Israel by lot; and, as some suppose, the Urim and Thummim was but a divinely appointed lot; of which it was said, “the lot is cast into the lap, or the bosom, and the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord.” Peter charges the ministers not to lord it over God’s lot, or churches. The word clergy is derived from this Greek term, though perverted to the very opposite use, to signify the ministers, in distinction from the people. In so many ways may the lot be employed, that it would be a waste of time to conjecture how it determined the man whom the Lord now chose; but the whole company, it is said, gave their lots, and *the* lot fell on Matthias. What a moment was this in his history! To be reckoned with the eleven apostles! First deemed fit by the body of the faithful, and then chosen by the Searcher of hearts! To take, as his own place, the ministry from which Judas by transgression fell! To be a witness to the world of the resurrection of Christ! A companion of the cross first, and then sit on one of the twelve thrones!

It has, however, strange to tell, been thought, that all this election was a mistake, arising from the apostles not waiting for the descent of the Spirit; and that Paul was the person designed to fill up the vacancy in their number. But if they had not received that gift which was to fit them to be Christ’s witnesses to the world, he had “breathed on them and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost;” he had “opened their understandings,” and instructed them in the affairs of the kingdom of God. If it be said, “We hear no more of Matthias,” this is equally true of other apostles. Matthias, with Paul, would make thirteen, where there were to be but twelve; this is a two-edged sword; for, upon any hypothesis, there were, at different times, thirteen; since Christ first chose twelve, and then added, at least, Paul. But, when Matthias was chosen, the apostolic commission was opened, *at Jerusalem*, with twelve

witnesses, "Peter standing up with the eleven," to whom Christ could say, "Ye are they who have continued with me in my temptation, and I appoint to you a kingdom to sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of *Israel*. Ye shall be my witnesses of the things ye have seen and heard in Jerusalem, and Judea, and Samaria;" which would include Matthias, but exclude Paul, who was bidden to depart from Jerusalem, and sent to be the apostle of the Gentiles. There were not thirteen, for any considerable time, James the brother of John being killed by the sword of Herod soon after the conversion of Paul; though it might be pleaded that the tribes of *Israel*, also, were thirteen. The strongest argument against this election of Matthias is, that an apostle must be chosen immediately by Christ himself, to which Paul alludes when he calls himself an apostle, not by man, but by Jesus Christ. We cannot, however, admit that this insinuates anything against Matthias, who was considered to be chosen by the Lord in the use of the lot, after solemn prayer to him who had promised to hear and grant what they agreed together to ask. The Holy Ghost calls them the twelve, before Paul's conversion.

Thus have we watched the first moments of that order of things under which Christians live; the church no longer looking for redemption, but redeemed; no more enjoying the presence of Christ in the flesh, but by him who has taken his throne in heaven, left to the ministry of the apostles and the dispensation of the Spirit, till Christ shall come to judgment. At the first glimpse of this, in prospect, "sorrow filled their hearts;" but it was expedient for us that Christ should go away, in order that the Comforter might come, and for him the Church was now to wait—not many days.

How to conduct ourselves in our Lord's absence is the grand lesson we have to learn, and this we are here taught—to meet together, to keep together in one accord; that, by this, "all men may know that we are Christ's disciples, because we love one another"—to continue in prayer and supplication for that Spirit whose coming is *the* promise of the Father, delivered to us by the lips of his Son—to do the work of Christ on earth, as his witnesses to the world, till all nations have heard the echo of that voice which first sounded from Jerusalem.

Thus the broken ranks of the Church shall ever be filled up

again ; and if a Judas “ fall by transgression, to go to his own place,” his treachery shall cover his own name with infamy, but shall leave the Saviour’s honour untarnished ; while a Matthias shall be raised up, to complete the number of the witnesses, and build up the Church against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. Who thinks the worse of Jesus on account of Judas ? For he that lived here as a prophet, and died as a priest, offering himself as the sacrifice, is gone to heaven, to reign as King and Lord of all. Angels descend to bear his messages to earth ; for such were the circumstances of his departure, that if the world taunt us with his absence, asking when and how our Lord was last seen, we reply, “ when he made the clouds his chariot and ascended to the skies, bidding his angelic attendants to go back and assure us he would come again in the same triumphant style. Meanwhile, we are not uninterested in what he is doing, while we cannot see him ; for he says, “ I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, ye may be also.” With what delight should we hear that this Jesus, whom we have seen go into heaven, shall come ; and with what earnestness should we cry, “ Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly !”

But look back and carefully observe the nature and design of the apostolic office. Matthias was added to make up the twelve, “ to be a witness with us of the resurrection.” He was, therefore, to be one who was with the Lord from the baptism of John till the day that Christ was taken up. When Paul was called to be an apostle he was made a witness and therefore “ saw that Just One,” after his resurrection. For men who have never seen Christ to pretend to be successors to the apostles is ridiculous, or rather impious. Had they professed to preserve twelve successors, there had been something more specious ; but hundreds of successors at once to the twelve apostles are like a host of kings in a country at one time, pretending to succeed to the last monarch.

See how early and how solemnly the principle of an election by the body of the faithful was sanctioned in the Church. Had the apostles taken the whole choice to themselves, how would this have been employed to prove that ministers, especially prelates, had the sole right to appoint their successors in office ? Observe how moral wealth may at once exalt and embarrass the

church. That there was not merely *one*, fit to be chosen to the apostolate, was to their honour ; for all agreed that there were two who might equally sustain the weighty charge ; and to prefer one would be injustice to the other.

Learn, then, to commit to the Head of the Church that decision which you cannot make with propriety yourselves. "The cause that is too hard for you, bring to me," saith the Lord. The person not chosen by Christ was honoured by the selection of the church, and seems to have been contented with this ; as our true happiness lies in being where God would have us to be. Let us rejoice if our Lord has provided another to fill that post for which many have deemed us fit.

In the present day, we are left to ordinary means of discerning our duty ; but we may take comfort from the thought that apostles, after exercising their best judgment, referred the final decision, by prayer, to that Lord who will show whom he has chosen.

When deprived of our most cherished bliss, such as Christ's bodily presence was to the first disciples, we shall find our true consolation in girding ourselves to the discharge of duty, which lies in meeting together, surrounding his throne, and proclaiming his name.

That the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles should be occupied with the departure of their Lord, and the filling up of their own number, as his chosen witnesses to the world, can excite no surprise. But our confidence in their testimony should be fortified by the humility which pervades this their first act. Important as was their calling (the least among them being greater than John the Baptist, the greatest who had been born of woman), who will charge them with taking this honour to themselves, or seeking their own glory ? They confess what might be deemed the disgraceful fact, that Judas was once among them, and they refer the choice of his successor to the judgment of the faithful, first, and, then, to their departed Lord. The history of the church being recorded, not for the sake of the builders, but for the honour of him who is its great foundation ; they leave their names and their labours to be forgotten, except where two or three are so employed, that it is necessary to our faith, to know how the kingdom of God was first set up among the Jews, and then "was taken from them to be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Who that possesses moral tact and

discernment is not penetrated with the conviction that we have, this day, listened to the exordium of a truthful story ?

Let us, then, improve it, by receiving the testimony of these apostles as the message of infinite mercy to fallen man, which calls for our faith in Jesus its theme, demands our obedience to his high commands, assures us of his wise conduct and mighty defence, and should inspire us with the loftiest hopes of bliss, in the departure of our spirits to that heaven whither he is gone, and the resurrection of our bodies when he shall "come again, as we have seen him go into heaven."

The junction that we have observed between the history of the Saviour and that of the church, the latter springing out of the former immediately as the plant from the root, explodes the strange notion of Strauss that the Gospels are a myth of later date. Repeatedly shall we see in the following chapters of this book that the "testimony of Jesus, complete as recorded in the Gospels, was, from the first, the theme of the apostles and preachers of the word."

On looking back over the first stage of this history, we observe that the Saviour is gone to heaven, and the chosen number of twelve witnesses is made complete, to begin, at Jerusalem, that proclamation of his name which was to fill the earth.

LECTURE II.

THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AT PENTECOST.

Acts ii.

As sin includes a double woe—guilt which exposes us to punishment, and depravity which renders us incapable of happiness; two grand characteristic doctrines may be said to embrace the whole of our religion—the redeeming work of Christ which procures salvation for us, and the renovating work of the Holy Spirit which produces salvation in us. Redemption procured is the theme of the Gospels; redemption applied is that of the Acts, which has therefore been called “the Gospel of the Holy Spirit.” If the apostles wondered that the Lord commanded them to “*wait* at Jerusalem for the promise of the Father;” we have now to behold them satisfied of the wisdom which delayed the opening of their commission to make it glorious and effective, and which rendered the church of the Crucified One a phoenix springing up resplendent from the ashes of the dead. Its first moments were a pledge of its universal endless triumph. This primary donation from the exalted Saviour, now become invisible, shows us what we may expect from him, till he shall return and “every eye shall see him.”

If the chapter on which we enter seems too long for one lecture, several circumstances concur to bring it within compass. Here are presented to us a miracle—a sermon—and the effects.

I. THE MIRACLE is recorded in the first thirteen verses.

Two subordinate miracles prepared the way for the principal, and all were distinguished by the time of the occurrence, which was "when the day of Pentecost was fully come;" that is, the fiftieth from the Passover. In Leviticus xxiii. 15, God said, "Ye shall count from the morrow of the Sabbath, seven Sabbaths complete, fifty days." This was called, therefore, the feast of weeks, when the Jews commemorated the giving of their law. Our Saviour died at the Passover, rose on the third day, and showed himself alive forty days, which would leave to the disciples ten days of prayerful waiting, to complete the fifty; reckoning Pentecost to be *fully* come, on the morning of the first day of the week, for a Jewish day commenced on the preceding evening. To give greater publicity to the descent of the Spirit, a festive day was chosen, when multitudes were assembled to witness the proclamation of the law of Christ, instead of that of Moses; and instead of the first fruits of the wheat harvest, were gathered the first fruits of Christ's death. Now might the church sing the words of David as a new song: "The Lord is among them as in Sinai; thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive, and received gifts for men, even the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them."

On this, the Lord's day, the disciples were "all, with one accord, together;" as, from the preceding chapter we should conclude, a hundred and twenty were in the upper room, which, *towards the inner* court of the house, was private enough for that which happened to themselves alone; and *towards the street*, sufficiently public for Peter to address the gathering crowd,—he not standing higher than a pulpit too often is. Cyril of Jerusalem says, a Christian church was built on the spot where the Spirit descended as a dove, where all was harmony and devotion.

1. *Two preparatory miracles are recorded*; one presented to the ear, and the other to the eye.

For, *First*, "Suddenly," where all had been still, "there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty breath, or wind." By *comparing* it to a breathing, or blowing, we are taught that it was not a wind, in which there would have been little or nothing miraculous, as there was in producing, without it, that peculiar sound which scarcely anything but the wind blowing

creates. It seemed not to sweep horizontally, like the wind, but to come down from heaven. The design of this, which I might call a noise coming perpendicularly down from heaven, was to direct their attention thither ; and as " it filled all the house where they were sitting," others were attracted to the spot where the roar seemed to intimate wind, while all was still around. To many, perhaps most Christians, this will recall the words which we read in the Gospel by John :—" The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth ; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." But I suspect we should there read, the Spirit breathes where he pleases ; and that *here* nothing more was intended than to rouse attention and direct the eye upwards, which was met by

The *second* preparatory miracle now presented to the eye. " There appeared to them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." Here, again, it is not said, there was fire, but what was like fire ; and who would compare a thing to itself ? As the wind would have been too little, fire would have been too much, requiring another miracle, to prevent its setting them all in flames ; and God never unnecessarily multiplies miracles. The principal object, the gift of tongues, has led to the opinion, that the *shape* of tongues was exhibited, overlooking the Hebrew idiom, by which a flame is called a tongue of fire, as an inlet is termed a tongue of the sea. Isaiah v. 24, margin. All that we can certainly know here is, that there were appearances like distinct flames, as if fire were, as usual, dividing into pointed flames, shooting upwards. Looking up to see whence the noise came, the disciples saw vibrating over each other's heads what they could compare to nothing but flames of fire, reminding them of the promise " to baptize them with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

It may, however, be asked, How can that promise be fulfilled, if there was no fire ? But, not to reply, " why say fire was like fire ?" What would a literal baptism of fire accomplish ? To the body ? To the soul ? John Baptist's word " fire " was exegetical, showing that Christ would shed his Spirit on us with penetrating, purifying power ; as " the Lord shall purge Jerusalem with the Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning," and Christ shall " be as a refiner's fire." Our Lord baptizes *all*

his disciples with fire, but not literally. The Greek participle viewed as in the imperfect tense of the middle voice, should be rendered, "There appeared to them tongues, as flames, that divided themselves, as if they were of fire."

2. *The principal, or that which may be called THE miracle, by emphasis.* When Luke says, "*it* sat on each of them," we cannot understand the tongues, such as the painters, often bad expositors, have represented. The verb in the singular may mean, the splendour, like fire; or rather, the Holy Spirit *rested* on each one, and they "were all filled with Him, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."

This twofold assertion of the universality of the inspiring influence embraces the hundred and twenty, and thus, probably, all the writers of the New Testament, except Paul, whose inspiration we know. Five of those writers, Matthew, John, Peter, James, and Jude, were here, as apostles; and we shall shortly show Luke here. Only Mark is wanting; but as Peter calls him "my son," he was, probably, with his father here; for it is folly to think of a spiritual son, where no *such* relation is mentioned. The evangelist Mark was not that nephew of Barnabas whose proper name was John, to which was added Mark, to distinguish him from the beloved disciple. They who were at this time enabled to "speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance," were unquestionably not less inspired, when they wrote that which has been the guide of the church in every subsequent age.

Their minds were filled with new light from the Spirit of Truth; their hearts glowed with the fire of Divine love, which compelled them to burst forth in adoration and praise; but, to their own astonishment, they found they could, in various tongues, which they had never learned, "speak the wondrous works of God;" saying, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us all exalt his name together: he has glorified his Son Jesus, exalted to his right hand him whom men hung on the cursed tree; has created sounds and sights by his wondrous power, filled our souls with divine gifts, and taught our tongues to speak his praise, in the various languages of the nations to whom he has sent us forth."

"There were dwelling occasionally (for some are said to be dwellers in Mesopotamia), at Jerusalem, devout men, out of every

nation under heaven," where the Jews were scattered; having, from pious motives, quitted their native lands for that in which they could worship God according to the law. "When this *noise* was heard," as the Syriac seems to understand it, "the multitude came together" to the spot which was filled with the sound; and as the upper room was open to the street, they were confounded because every man heard some one speaking in his own native tongue. As Peter afterwards seems to have spoken in the language of the country, but with the northern brogue, which had made one say, "Thou art a Galilean, and thy speech bewrayeth thee;" he seems now to have spoken Syriac, so that it was said, "Are not *all* these who speak, Galileans? How hear we, then, every man in our own native tongue?" The nations that are enumerated present to us—the Parthians, at the utmost boundary of the Roman empire; the Medes, to whose cities the ten tribes were led captive; the Elamites, who may be called Persians; the dwellers in Mesopotamia, between the Tigris and Euphrates; Judæa is specified because it differed in dialect from Galilee; the people of the Lesser Asia are mentioned as speaking Greek; after which, Africa presents Egypt, with its peculiar tongue, and the parts of Lybia about Cyrene, where a colony of Jews had been settled, near the modern Algiers; strangers of Rome, where Latin was spoken; native Jews and proselytes, from other nations; are followed by Cretes of the island on the farthest west, and Arabians on the Red Sea, where Arabic has been preserved for thousands of years. But while they exclaim, "What can this mean?" some said, in pure mockery, these men are filled with sweet wine; not "new," as we read; for it was now June, and the new *wine* did not come in till September. Some suppose palm-wine was intended, though the Hebrew phrase, "he has sweetened himself," meaning he has drunk freely, seems to be all that was intended. As this was in reply to the expressions of astonishment from those who heard them speak, in their own tongue, the wonderful works of God, it was not the language of reason, but of reckless scorn; for none but those who were themselves drunk, could suppose that intoxication would enable a person to speak foreign tongues, though it might prevent the proper use of his own.

Twelve or fifteen languages are said to be spoken by those

who were mostly fishermen of Galilee; and be it remembered, that the hearers were the judges, who knew that in their tongues were spoken the wondrous works of God. This is totally unlike the late fanatical pretensions to the gift of tongues, in this city; where the speakers alone pretended to use foreign languages, while the hearers had no evidence that there was anything but unmeaning jargon. The dying away of that pretence showed the impossibility of counterfeiting such a miracle as this; which most commends itself to those who best know what it is to acquire and to speak foreign tongues. It is a work of so much labour, even to a cultivated mind, that others can form no conception of what it is to stand up and preach in any other than one's own native tongue.

Who is not struck with the wisdom and power which thus gave to the disciples of Christ exactly what they needed to enable them to go forth into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature? Though they may have visited more nations than are here enumerated, we never find them at a loss; but always ready to "speak in their tongues." How much this miraculous gift was worth we are made to feel by the time and labour consumed to fit modern missionaries to go and preach among the heathen, which has led some to deny the duty, under the pretence that the miracle must be repeated ere the heathen world can be converted. As if it had not been demonstrated that we can acquire other languages!

I have avoided all mystical allusions, for the moral, or intellectual, miracle, was that on which we should fix our minds, as a lasting monument of our Redeemer's wisdom, power, and goodness, who, having charged his apostles to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, here qualified them for the work which he had before rendered it their bounden duty to undertake.

II. THE SERMON, TO WHICH THE MIRACLE GAVE RISE, NOW claims notice.

Peter, first, repelled the charge of drunkenness; showing that as it was the third hour, nine o'clock in the morning, and a holy day, when they were accustomed to offer the morning devotions before they ate or drank, there was no probability in the insinuation, whose falsehood his own rational discourse would demonstrate. As this will contain quotations from books of the Old

Testament, the minute examination of which belongs to the exposition of those books, I shall but show their applicability to the purpose for which they are adduced. Lifting up his voice, to be heard by a crowd, Peter said, "This is what is spoken by the prophet Joel," ii. 28—32, to which I now refer you. Surenhusius, who has well discussed the Jewish mode of quotation, observes, that the *written* language of the prophet is not professedly quoted here, but the apostolic speaker appeals to the prophet, *as a speaker*, giving the sentiment, for in this, and not in syllables and sounds, the Scripture consists. "The last days" were a phrase for the age of Messiah, to which Rabbinical writers apply this passage, when God would thus pour out his Spirit on all flesh, Gentiles as well as Jews, and daughters as well as sons should share it, as we find the daughters of Philip prophesied; and for this reason the women were particularly mentioned with the hundred and twenty.

The "signs in heaven and earth," which preceded the destruction of Jerusalem, are associated with "blood and fire and pillars of smoke;" for the whole land may be said to have been a heap of smoking ruins steeped in blood. "The sun turned into darkness and the moon into blood," manifestly bold figures, are almost identical with what the prophet Joel had just before said. Here, however, are predicted the extinction of all the light and glory and rule of the Jewish state, in the great and terrible day of God's judgment. For we shall soon hear Peter pronounce Jerusalem doomed, as he had heard from Christ.

Having invited them to call on our Lord for salvation, Peter now proceeds to his grand testimony—"Jesus of Nazareth, whom God demonstrated to them, by miracles, which they knew to have been wrought by him," though God works miracles by none but the holy, is set before them *as "a man;"* for if they could be brought to own him as here exhibited, they would believe all that he said of his "coming from heaven" and being "one with the Father." But they had an obstinate prejudice against a suffering Messiah, and it was necessary to show them that, if he was delivered up to his enemies, it was by the "definite counsel and foreknowledge of God." The hearers had knowledge enough of Scripture to perceive that this was foreknown, and must have been designed; for the determinate counsel Jehovah expressed by Zechariah, "Awake, O sword;" Zech. xiii. 7.

“ But you, having taken, by wicked hands have crucified and slain him ;” for in vain you would say, the Romans did it, since you embrued your hands in his blood, when you cried, “ Crucify him.” But Luther’s translation states this more specifically— “ By the hands of the wicked,” rendering also the preceding words more literally, “ fastened, or nailed him,” where our translation says, “ crucify :” the idea is “ *nauling* him to the cross.”

The apostle then adduced a testimony which must have fallen as a thunder-bolt : “ Whom God has raised up ;” for it was well known at Jerusalem that Jesus said he would rise again ; and that they who set a guard to prevent it, were obliged to say, “ The soldiers slept and the body was stolen.” But God “ loosed the pains of death,” a phrase which has created great embarrassment ; for, while it evidently alludes to the Hebrew expression, “ the cords of death,” it seems, as here applied to the resurrection, to intimate that the stringent thing, which makes death painful to contemplate, is the separation of body and soul. God, by bringing back Jesus from the separate state, had loosed these most painful bands of Hades, which kept soul and body apart, and by which it was not possible for Jesus to be held.

In confirmation of this, the sixteenth Psalm is quoted, where David speaks, in the person of Christ, language which renders the exposition of that psalm at once interesting and difficult. But here we are assured of its prophetic reference to Christ, who, amidst arduous labours and sufferings unto death, was confident of his Father’s approbation ; so that his very flesh is represented as lying down securely in the bosom of hope, rather than of the grave ; because “ thou, O Father, wilt not leave my soul in Hades.” For this word should not have been translated hell, which, however, seems to have formerly signified, in our language, the hidden state, though it now means that of torment. The Church of Rome contended, through ignorance, that Christ’s soul went to the abode of the lost, and the Protestants, that the soul in hell meant the body in the grave. But both were wrong ; though error is most fatal to Rome, which claims infallibility. The soul, not the body, is spoken of ; and the word Hades in the Greek, with the Sheol of the Hebrew, signify the abode of separate spirits. The Syriac says, “ It was not possible for Christ’s soul to be held in Sheol,” or Hades.

To the thief on the cross Christ promised an abode with him, that day, in the paradise of happy spirits. But the Father would not leave the soul which Christ committed to him long enough in Hades, or the invisible world of spirits, for the body to see corruption. In spices, though not formally embalmed, it lay but one whole day in the grave, and, above all, it was the undefiled temple of the Godhead of the Holy One. Of the joy with which he came back to life we leave the expositor of the psalm to speak.

Peter, addressing the Jews as brother men, not as Gentiles, who were not his kindred according to the flesh, says, "I may speak to you with freedom of the patriarch David; that he died and was buried, and his tomb is with us;" for the princes of the house of David were allowed to be buried in the holy city; so that history speaks much of David's sepulchre. But he was a prophet, and, "knowing God had sworn to seat one from the fruit of his loins upon his throne,"* as we read (2 Samuel vii. 12) — "Foreseeing, he spake of the resurrection of Christ, that he was not left to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption."

"Him has God raised up, of which we, all the twelve who are here standing, are witnesses," by which the enemies were invited to cross-examine them, and put the story of their stealing Christ's body to the test. But he that was raised from the grave is no longer on the earth; is exalted to God's right hand in heaven, where, having received from the Father the promised spirit, he has shed forth that which you see in the symbol of fiery appearance over our heads, and hear in the numerous tongues which have excited in you who understood them such surprise, we being known to be Galileans.

Having shown them that David, in the sixteenth psalm, could not have spoken of his own resurrection, the apostle now proves, that, in the hundred and tenth, the Psalmist was not the person who was said to ascend to heaven. Some have contended that paradise is the term for the felicity of a *separate* spirit, and that *heaven* is appropriated to the consummation of bliss, in body as well as soul, while David's body lay buried at Jerusalem. If most of the pious will be glad that this cannot be satisfactorily established, it is certain that, to ascend to heaven, and sit at the Father's right hand, is language expressive of that ascent from

* Griesbach's reading.

earth to heaven, in body as well as soul, which belonged, not to David, but to Christ alone, as the words of the Psalmist show : " The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand." Thus Christ had before shown the Jews that Messiah was David's Lord. That all his enemies would be made his footstool was a sentence full of terror to those who at Jerusalem had killed him ; and the whole house of Israel were assured that " God had made that same Jesus whom you have crucified both Lord and Christ ;" intimating that the right to these titles was now, not originated, but consummated and demonstrated. On this Lord, then, whosoever shall call shall be saved, though sinners of Jerusalem that crucified him.

To what a torrent of important reflections this first apostolical sermon gives rise ! Verily these are " the words of truth and soberness !" " Words which the Holy Ghost teacheth." " This witness is true," is the sentence of every discerning mind. What an appeal to the Scriptures of truth, before an audience which is presumed to be so well acquainted with them that it was enough to mention the writer ! The miraculous operations of the Spirit are declared to have been promised to that very generation that here wondered, and there mocked. Jehovah said, " I will pour out my spirit," and Jesus is declared to have shed forth this, though he had just before been called a man ; for he is also, in the same discourse, termed David's Lord. Who can see Peter point to David's tomb, and not own that the royal Psalmist spake of the resurrection of Christ, who came back to life, full of joy, and entered into his Father's presence, to dwell at his right hand, where eternal pleasures crown him, while he waits till his enemies are made his footstool ?

But what an indictment against a nation, that it had wickedly killed Him whom mighty miracles had proved to be the hope of Israel, and who now had proved himself alive again, and seated higher than angels dare aspire ; " for to which of the angels said He at any time, Sit thou at my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool ? Are they not all ministering spirits ?" What glory is here thrown around the Crucified One ! The cross is exchanged for the throne where angels bow ! He that was crucified in weakness is here proved to live in power, beyond all physical might, by shedding forth the spirit of holiness, more glorious for the fire of love which

he sheds abroad in the heart, than for the appearance of flames that quivered over the speaker's head, and more honoured by the wisdom, truth, and power with which the Gospel was now preached, than by the Polyglott of languages in which the first teachers spake. For while Peter addressed Judean brethren, in their own tongue, others preached to the strangers in theirs.

III. THE EFFECTS we now behold. Ver. 37—end.

Here we shall pass over some things which will be more advantageously considered where they again occur.

As the spirit that was now poured forth was promised, to convince the world of sin, taking away the heart of stone and giving the heart of flesh, He caused those who heard, to be pierced to the heart with a conviction of the truth of the charge brought against them, and of the enormity of the crime committed against Jesus, who had proved himself exalted to the throne of heaven. Conceive yourself placed in their circumstances: yesterday, to have cried, "Crucify him;" and to-day, to discover that this was the Lord of glory, who had you at his footstool, and could crush you to death; and think what anguish would pierce your heart! They, therefore, appealed, not to Peter only, but to the rest of the apostles, who all stood there, as witnesses, honoured with the powers of the Holy Spirit; and the multitude, addressing them, not merely as fellow-men, but brothers, by descent from Abraham, ask, "What shall we do?" Can nothing be done? Are we for ever lost? If not, say what we shall do! The conversions and the conduct of the converted are full of interest.

1. *The conversions followed on the words of mercy which Peter spoke.* "Repent" is, to a careless rebel, an offensive word; and even to one who is merely alarmed, repentance seems like a nauseous medicine that he must take or die; but to one convinced of sin, at the sight of a crucified Saviour, it is pregnant with hope. We never hear of repentance preached to devils. But "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself," and what calls us to a change of mind is a ministry of reconciliation. These men had asked what they should do,—meaning, to escape the wrath to come; and this was the reply—"Repent." For "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth," since "repentance is *unto life*."

When true, it is a change of mind, and will therefore be

followed by conversion, which is a change of life ; and, as “ with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation ;” the apostle exhorts the penitents to be “ baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.” This overt act of submission, to the name of Jesus, as Christ, or Messiah, was necessary for every one who would prove that he had repented of rejecting him. Some have supposed that the name of Jesus only, was necessary to the Jews ; while Gentiles were to be baptized in the name of the Father and Holy Spirit also ; but we find the name of Jesus employed in the same way among the Gentiles ; for it refers to the *authenticity* of Christ, who enjoined baptism ; and not to the form of words in which it was administered. The remission of sins is here, and elsewhere, promised through the name of Jesus, as all the prophets bear witness, and as these penitents must have been delighted to hear. Those who had cried, “ His blood be on us and our children,” most joyously learned, that, through that blood, there was remission of even that sin. “ If the man who thrust the spear into the Saviour’s side was there, he might now learn,” as Dr. Grosvenor observes, “ that there was a nearer way to Christ’s heart.”

But, that they should “ receive the gift of the Holy Ghost,” must have appeared the crowning blessing. What ! shall that Power Divine which has astonished us in others, descend upon ourselves ? Shall we be baptized with heavenly fire and, transported with the glory of Christ, speak in various tongues, the wonderful works of God ? Will mercy thus seal its pardon on our souls, by filling us with its holiest, mightiest gifts ?

Many were blessed with miraculous powers. But it is simply the gift of the Spirit that the apostle declared to be included in the promise by the prophet Joel ; and that it applied, not only to themselves, but to their children ; nor, only to the Jews, who were nigh to God by privilege and profession ; but also to the Gentiles, whom the Apostle to the Ephesians calls those “ who were far off.” For this was the promise, “ I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh ; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.” It has been quaintly said, that, the *latitude* of the promise was to believers and their children ; and the *longitude* of it, to those who were far off, wherever the Lord our God shall call a people by the Gospel. To say that the promise is

only to those of our children whom the Lord shall call, is to make the mention of the children nugatory ; for all who are called have the promise whether they are Christians' children or not ; which proves that the "calling" must be taken, as it stands, in connexion with those who are afar off ; that, when the Lord shall call them, by the Gospel, they also shall have the "promise to them and their children." The evangelical dispensation commenced, like the Abrahamic, with the promise to the "believer and his seed ;" for the Gospel brings blessings, but takes away none ; "else were your children unclean ; but now are they holy." "If you are Christ's, you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." We have, however, not the whole of Peter's sermon ; for "with many other words he testified" to Christ, and exhorted them to receive him as Messiah and Lord. One of these words, indeed, is deemed of so special importance as to be recorded : "be saved from this perverse generation," which, having crucified Christ, and still persisting in rejecting him, is branded as an abandoned race, by Isaiah's question, "Who shall declare his generation ?" and marked for judgment, by Joel, in his prediction of "the great and terrible day of the Lord." Like Lot, from a city about to be consumed with the fire of God's judgments, escape by joining the Christian church, which will be snatched as a brand from the burning.

They, therefore, having cried out, "What shall we do ?" gladly receiving the word of *mercy* concerning repentance and remission of sins ; and the word of *duty* concerning open obedience to Christ's commands, were baptized ; in what *mode* we shall consider when we come to the case of the Ethiopian. "There were added about three thousand souls," on that day, by baptism, as the order of the words would indicate ; but it is not said, "to the church," which probably was not yet formally arranged till these elements were produced.

Three thousand strike us as a large number ; but they may have been much fewer than the hearers, and though there may never have been so many converted since, in one assembly, for we say not "under one sermon ;" yet amidst the many thousand churches where Christ is preached and his Spirit imparted, there may be as many called, every Lord's-day. This may have been the fruit of several sermons, preached by various apostles, in many different languages, to Jews from various countries, by

which the promise was fulfilled, that when "the root of Jesse shall be an ensign for the Gentiles, the Lord should recover the remnant of his own people from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea," (Isaiah xi. 11) including most of the nations here assembled. Nor should it be concluded that the three thousand were all alike, either before, or after, this day; for, not to say that some may have been previously devout, though not yet acquainted with Jesus as the Messiah; others may have been like Ananias and Sapphira, or even have included these very persons; for amidst much wheat we must expect some chaff. General results are here mentioned, without entering into particulars.

2. *The conduct of the converted demands some consideration, though several other occasions will be afforded for viewing it in its various lights.* "They persevered in the instruction of the apostles," of which they who hitherto were ignorant had much need; and their baptism was considered as an introduction to the Christian school, where they might learn more fully the way of the Lord. They "continued in the communion," by which I understand that partnership of property which will be discussed when the sin of Ananias and Sapphira is mentioned. "The breaking of bread" is the term for the Lord's supper, which was immediately introduced and persevered in by those who had learned what they owed to the Saviour's death. United prayer, which had brought down the Spirit, was dear to those who enjoyed his grace.

That "fear came upon every soul," standing in contrast with the gladness of the disciples, and in connexion with the numerous wonders and signs wrought by the hands of the apostle, intimates the awe which these miracles of power and grace created in the public mind. The miracles gave force to the testimony that the nation had murdered its Messiah, and might expect a day of judgment from which it would be wise to flee, and even the mockers could not help trembling at heart.

"The believers, however, kept together" as one family, supported by one estate; though they daily continued harmoniously to go up to the temple, where they had been accustomed to worship, and where they met others to whom they delivered their testimony. For Providence overruled their want of a building for

their large assembly ; and made it subservient to the publicity which truth seeks and which was a blessing to the Jews who were not yet cast off. The Epistle to the Hebrews shows what opportunities the temple, with its rites, must have afforded for preaching Christ and him crucified. When they broke bread in remembrance of Christ, it was at each other's houses ; for they could not do this in the temple ; though the special notice taken of their being together leads me to doubt whether separate parties celebrated the supper, at the same time, in different houses, with various apostles presiding ; for I think that they who had estates which they could sell may have had, also, among them some owners of mansions sufficiently large to enable them to maintain their unity by surrounding one table. In a numerous society, one-third must often be absent.

The distinction between the breaking of bread in remembrance of Christ's body being broken for us ; and the partaking of ordinary meals, is shown, when it is said, " they partook of their food with gladness and simplicity of heart." What a display of justification by faith ! They had, by the name of Jesus, received forgiveness of sins most atrocious ; a burthen was taken off their oppressed consciences ; they beheld God as their reconciled father and friend ; they tasted his love in their daily food, which they partook to support them in serving him, and shared, by generous love, with each other ; and what are royal dainties when compared with the feast which pardoned souls enjoy ?

" Praising God" for the grace they had received, " they enjoyed favour with the whole people," who saw their generosity, their felicity, their lovely harmony, and those miraculous powers from which many derived health and comfort.

" The Lord added the saved, daily to the church ;" and it should be noticed, that this is the first time the church is mentioned as in existence ; though our Redeemer spoke of it by anticipation. Previously to this period, the Jewish was the religion of Christ and his disciples ; but after Christ was rejected, " the kingdom of God was taken from that nation ; Christ nailed the hand-writing of ordinances to the cross, abolishing the law of ceremonies, breaking down the middle wall of partition, and making of two one new man." In its elements, the Christian church was formed when the Holy Spirit called the three thousand ; and after this, the apostles separated the disciples into a

distinct assembly, which we translate by the word church, that signifies nothing more than, congregation called out. To this, the Lord added daily ; for it is his work ; and our translators should not have consulted their prejudices, when professing to give the word of God, which says, " the Lord added the saved." " Such as should be saved," little helps the cause of a promiscuous communion, called a church ; for if such persons cannot be said to be saved, neither can they be denominated those who shall be saved. But to those who are called by grace, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and justified by faith, it is said, " He saved us and called us." " Ye are saved, by grace, through faith ; and that not of yourselves ; it is the gift of God." These are the persons whom the Lord added to the church, every day ; for Christ was now fulfilling his word with regard to the rock which Peter confessed, " On this will I build my church." Such was the apostolic church, and such were the additions the Lord made to it, " those that were saved." An assembly of men not saved by grace, though making high pretensions, is called by Christ, not a church, but a " synagogue of Satan."

Behold the fulfilment of the Saviour's promise to him that first owned Jesus to be the Messiah. " I give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." See Peter employ that key which opened the door to let in three thousand converted Jews. The coward is become a hero. See, also, the reason why the Lord commanded his ambassadors to the world, to " begin at Jerusalem," that the door of faith might be first opened to them to whom Christ came ; for here the resurrection of Christ was openly witnessed, where the best opportunities were possessed for putting its truth to the severest test. Here the first church was formed of thousands who believed. At Jerusalem, Christ's heart was pierced, and where it poured out the blood of atonement it poured out the water of regeneration.

Behold the triumph of forgiveness of enemies, when Christ begins to show mercy and forgive sins, just where the preacher said, " You have killed him." See, the Gospel is the " dispensation of the Spirit." It is the Holy Ghost that glorifies Christ, by rearing in the earth a church to his praise. Observe how Peter speaks of " the Gospel preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven."

Three important considerations still demand special attention.

The first concerns the relative position which miracles hold in the Christian dispensation. The sound from the skies ; the appearance of flames over the disciples' heads ; and even the numerous tongues in which they spake, instead of being dwelt upon with triumphant laudation, are almost forgotten as soon as they had gained public attention. The awakened mind is turned at once to the Scriptures, to the intellectual and moral considerations which should affect, not the senses, but the understanding, the conscience, and the heart ; so that this extraordinary history closes with an exhibition of repentance, faith, obedience, Christian fellowship, exalted charity, sanctity which inspired enemies with awe ; in fact, the things which, in all ages and lands, " accompany salvation." The miraculous powers are exhibited as subservient to the graces of the Holy Spirit. By these, a nobler triumph shall be achieved when all nations shall, in their numerous tongues, declare the wondrous works of God.

Observe, in the next place, how that which was greater than miracles was obtained. It was, after the whole company of the faithful had continued in prayer and supplication, waiting the fulfilment of their Saviour's promise, that this torrent of blessings was shed, reminding us how we should now persevere in prayer, " until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high and the wilderness become a fruitful field." It was, however, not merely the prayer of faith, but the preaching of the truth, to which the Spirit set his seal. He that thus " sent the rod of his strength out of Zion, to rule in the midst of his enemies," will, at length, subdue all nations to the obedience of faith, by the Gospel preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. For I reserve to the last that which I consider the most important reflection, as it should produce the most practical effect.

Our Lord left this world, saying, " All power is given to me in heaven and in earth, go ye therefore, and teach all nations ;" though these included a Babel of languages, and he was speaking to a company of fishermen, who knew no tongue but their own. But he took care to gather, on the spot where he commanded them to wait, a congregation of nations, who should be judges and witnesses of the fulfilment of his promise, which gave rationality to his command. For they who were to " speak with new tongues" might visit new lands and be everywhere at home. Their miraculous faculty penetrated them with a sense of duty

and made them say, "I am debtor to the Greeks and to the barbarians. Why have we received all languages; but that we might preach Christ to all nations?" The cosmopolite character of our religion is seen on the day of its birth; for in its cradle it spake all tongues.

Can we doubt that many of these foreigners left Jerusalem, to speak, "in the tongues and in the lands in which they were born," the wonderful works which they had heard from the apostles' lips? The "strangers of Rome" are the only persons to whom the Scripture enables us to trace the founding of the church at Rome. Thus everything conspired to give to that religion which sprang from the bosom of nationality, the universality which is its special destination and its high desert. The confusion of tongues at Babel divided the nations, the gift of tongues at Pentecost afforded the means of their reunion.

One remark on the nature of inspiration, as it concerns the writers of the New Testament, whom I have supposed to have been present and partakers of the miraculous gift, I commend to consideration. Many are reluctant to admit a verbal inspiration; but what else was the gift of tongues?

Suffer me to add that the question of the continuance of miracles is here decided. Of all miracles, the church of Christ most needed to retain the gift of tongues, to fulfil our Lord's command, "Preach the Gospel to every creature." Rome pretends to retain miraculous powers, but her missionaries have been obliged to learn languages in order to preach in them, and have confessed their failure for want of them. Who, then, will credit her pretences to other miraculous powers?

Let us not, however, conclude that miracles of grace have ceased. The grand blessing exhibited in this chapter is, not the power of speaking tongues that men had not learned, for this was merely the means to a further end, which was, thousands cut to the heart, repenting of sin, crying for mercy, believing on Jesus, trusting to his righteousness, obeying his commands, joining his church, rejoicing in his salvation, walking in his footsteps, living to his praise. For these miracles of mercy, the Spirit is still poured out, where the Gospel is preached, and for this we should ever pray, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, "I will pray to the Father and he will give you another advocate, the Spirit of Truth, to abide with you for ever; and when he is

come, he will convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and judgment to come. Of sin, because they believe not on me ; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more ; of judgment, because the Prince of this world is judged." John xvi. 8—11.

Our second stage of advancement shows the grand promise of the departing Saviour fulfilled, that we may expect his Gospel to become triumphant by the power of his Spirit, and all his promises to be in their season made good.

LECTURE III.

THE FIRST RECORDED MIRACLE WROUGHT BY THE WITNESSES TO CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

Acts iii.

IF infidels have derided miracles, as an appeal to the senses rather than to reason, that miracle which we have just seen wrought *upon* the apostles rather than *by* them should propitiate such objectors ; for it was designed to enable the first preachers of the Gospel to address the judgment and the heart of man in every nation, through that medium by which we best acquire knowledge—our own mother tongue. Miracles in general, however, are, in their own proper place, capable of the most satisfactory defence. For when a new dispensation of religion is introduced to the world, it is manifestly fit that our Creator should convince us it comes from Him who made and will judge us, by accrediting it with such attendant changes wrought on creation, as will render the physical world subservient to the moral, and bodies conducive to the interests of the immortal soul. That specious objection which has been urged, that miraculous changes in the course of nature imply a change in the mind of the Creator, has no force against miracles foretold by prophecy ; for the prediction shows that it was in the intention of Him who established the ordinary laws of creation to make a change, and the miracle then proves that he has not altered his mind. That

“many wonders and signs were done by the apostles” was affirmed, in the preceding chapter, but we now enter upon the consideration of the first which is narrated at some length, and was a fulfilment of the prophecy delivered by Isaiah, many ages before : “Then shall the lame man leap as a hart.”

Our time will be divided between the consideration of the miraculous cure, and the attention that is due to the discourse by which it was followed.

I. THE MIRACULOUS CURE. Ver. 1—11.

Here, the instruments employed by our Lord, the subject of the cure, the manner in which it was performed, and the effect upon the spectators, present instructive lessons.

1. *The persons employed* were “Peter and John, who were going up together to the temple, at the hour of prayer, which was the ninth.” Peter and John were often associated, being sent by Christ to prepare for the last Passover, and on other occasions, by which they learned that “two are better than one,” and became endeared to each other, by their very differences in character and gifts. For these specimens of faith and love, of ardour and gentleness, teach us, that, diversity is not contrariety, and that, variety in harmony is beauty preferable to dull uniformity. He that would rashly draw the sword needs the society of him who would prevail, only by love ; while the gentle and the amiable are pressed into their field of action by men of daring zeal.

As Peter envied not the title of “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” nor John the honour of him to whom the Saviour had committed the keys of the kingdom, they went up together in holy harmony to the temple which God said should be “the house of prayer.” Though “Christ had blotted out the handwriting of commandments contained in ordinances, nailing it to his cross,” and the Jewish dispensation was virtually superseded by the Christian, that which had “waxed old, and was ready to vanish away,” was not rudely deserted, all at once ; but, having been appointed, received an honourable dismissal, and, if I might be allowed a figure so strange, the grave of the old religion was made the cradle of the new. They who went to the temple saw the true glory of its worship, in the light which has been shed on *us* by the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The hour of prayer was not prescribed by the law, but arose out of the time of offering the sacrifices; and, as David said, "Evening, morning, and noon, will I pray to Thee," the time of morning prayer, called the third hour, was our nine o'clock; the noon was their six; and the evening, called by them the ninth hour, was three in the afternoon, which will account for something we shall have to notice. For the same reason that the two apostles went to the temple at all, they chose the hour of prayer; for then they might expect the greatest concourse of people, to whom they could preach Christ crucified; but we cannot doubt that he directed their steps to an interesting scene, though it ended in their imprisonment.

2. *The subject of the miracle was a "man lame from his mother's womb."* This congenital disease, like the blindness which Christ cured, was designed to preclude all suspicion of collusion; for infancy knows no imposture, and the mother who bare him knew his inability to walk. He was, at this time, being borne, to be laid, during the concourse to prayer, by those friends who best knew his infirmities, and who daily laid him at the gate of the temple called Beautiful. This was on the east, over against the most holy place; the chief gate, of which Josephus speaks in raptures, on account of its magnificence; for it was thirty cubits, or forty-five feet, high. Its material was Corinthian brass, valued by the ancients above gold, and said to have been accidentally produced when the burning of Corinth by the Romans fused brass, silver, and gold, into one common mass.

Here behold magnificence and meanness—the mendicant cripple asking alms in Solomon's Porch! Jews were taught by their law to be kind to the poor, and all who cared enough for religion to come up to the temple to worship, might be expected to "give to him that needeth." This man, carried up to the gate as Peter and John entered in, naturally turned his eyes towards them, and asked relief, not distinguishing them from others, nor thinking how much better blessings he would receive than mere mortals could bestow. But as, said one of the ancients, Saul sought for asses and found a kingdom, this beggar asked a mite and received a miracle. He was not the only one who has found at God's temple better blessings than he sought.

3. *The manner in which it was wrought is full of interest.*

Peter was, as usual, foremost; but John, moved by the same Spirit, cast a kindred glance, so that it seemed one voice which said, "Look on *us*." We shall soon see that this was not the language of the vain and conceited, wishing to be gazed at; but of wise consideration for the honour of their Lord. For such a speech would make others look, as well as the cripple, to see what would come of it; for, at least, it might be expected to preface alms of more than usual amount. The lame man "attended to them, expecting to receive something from them," and would be disappointed and vexed to hear Peter say, "Silver and gold have I none." "Why, then, bid me look at you?" he might have said. But such were the apostles of Christ: "Poor, yet making many rich." We have already learned that the first disciples sold their possessions, and parted to all that had need, and we cannot doubt that the apostles might have had all the money they wanted; but here we see their superiority to the love of filthy lucre, for they had come out without any, and thus was made conspicuous their supernatural wealth. It is related that, when one of the Popes was counting out, with his Cardinals, the money that was pouring into their coffers, a person came in, to whom the Pontiff said, "You see the successors of Peter cannot say, 'Silver and gold have I none.' " "No," replied the other; "nor can they say, 'Rise up and walk.' "

But Peter said, "Such as I have;" and this was such as no kings could say "I have," nor all their wealth could purchase. "Such as I have!" What consciousness of having miraculous powers! What confidence in the faithfulness and unfailing dominion of Christ over the laws of nature! "In the name of Jesus, the Messiah of Nazareth!" for it must always be remembered that Christ is but Greek for Messiah; but the Messiah of Nazareth was a sound hated by the Jews. Yet, by thus pronouncing it beforehand, the apostle staked all the credit of that name on the sequence of the miracle; for he well knew what contempt would be poured on Christ, if the event did not follow. But dear as that name was to him, Peter threw down the stake, for his faith knew no fear. "Rise and walk," he said, with no air of mystic incantation, muttering "low out of the ground," as the prophet said of the juggling tricks in heathen temples, but with clear intelligible speech, aware that nothing but the fact could save himself from ridicule and scorn.

But as even one who could walk might, when lying on the ground, need a hand to lift him, "Peter took him by the right hand," and with that touch the power of Christ went forth, a healing virtue entered the crippled frame, and "immediately the feet and ankles," where the defect lay, "received strength;" and that complicated part of the body, by which we move about, was restored. "He leaped up," feeling that he could, though for the first time in his life. How natural! How joyful! It must have seemed to him as flying would to us! "He stood," who never stood before, upright, and looking down on others to whom he had hitherto looked up, and almost proud of being so tall. "He walked about," as if to assure himself and show to others that he could walk, which we could not do at once, but after having learned the art of walking, by many strange efforts, balancing the frame by swinging the arms, to throw the centre of gravity between the feet. This cure was perfect in a moment.

He entered with them into the temple; for here was his first walk, which he had doubtless often wished to take, when, lying at the gate, he envied others that privilege. If he knew the Scriptures, he might recall the words of Hezekiah, saying, on his miraculous recovery, "What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?"

But with simple truthful grace the Scriptures exhibit the man "walking, leaping, and praising God," as if he could never make enough of his new powers, but now walked, now leaped about, half frantic with joy. That "he praised God," too, is, with what occurs in the next chapter, an intimation that his soul shared in the healing power of Christ. Oh, to have heard him say, "Come, magnify the Lord with me, and let us all exalt his name together! Now is come the blessing promised when 'the lame man shall leap as a hart,' and 'the tongue of the dumb speak plainly.' Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things; and blessed be his glorious name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen."

4. *The effects on the spectators* should not pass unnoticed. "All the people saw him walking and praising God," which would have excited no wonder in any other case; for what more natural than that he who had come up to the temple should walk in it, praising the God who is there adored? But "they knew

that this was he who used to sit at the gate begging ;” for such persons, in public places, become a species of acquaintance, and many make it a point constantly to give them something. Sure of the person, therefore, they were filled with astonishment at what had happened to him. “How is it that he is thus walking and leaping ?” they exclaim. No mortal could make that cripple walk as he now can !

But as “he kept holding Peter and John,” one in each hand, such a triad, an apostle on each side and a cured cripple in the midst, seemed to say, “He is unwilling to let them go, as if half afraid that the continuance of his cure depended on their presence or their touch.” “The people ran together,” which should not seem strange, though in the temple ; for this word is applied, not exclusively to that which was strictly the place of worship, which was very small, but to the porches and courts around, where the multitudes assembled, and scrupled not to run and talk, or even trade ; though the latter was condemned by our Lord. The porch was called Solomon’s, because it was erected by Herod over the spot where Solomon’s stood, in the first temple, which was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. The sacred historian closes by saying, that “the crowds who ran to gaze at this sight were astonished.” Such was the audience to which was addressed that which we now must hear.

II. THE DISCOURSE OF PETER TO THE MULTITUDE. Ver. 12 to end of the chapter.

This is remarkable, for its introduction, which was stamped with humility ; its substance, which is marked with fidelity ; and its application, which breathes mercy.

1. *The exordium of the discourse is stamped with humility.* Ver. 12. Peter addressed them, “as men of Israel,” to remind them of their privileges and obligations ; for he was to appeal to Scripture, and God “had given his word unto Jacob and his statutes unto Israel, though he had not dealt so with every nation.” But, when he said, “Why marvel ye at this ?” they might have been expected to reply, “Why not marvel ? for is not this a miraculous thing ?” but that Peter had reason to say, “Have you never seen such things in the life of Jesus ?” When the apostle asks, “Why look ye so earnestly at *us* ?” he alluded to the *name* in which they had wrought the miracle ; though

the crowd gazed at the instruments, as if "by their own power or piety they had made the man to walk." An impostor would have exulted in acquiring credit for innate power and moral worth; but a servant of God repels ascriptions of praise for what he feels he cannot claim. If we know ourselves, we are conscious that we have neither physical nor moral force, to call our own. "God has spoken once; yea, twice have I heard this, that power belongeth to God: also to thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy." The Creator is "the only fountain of might and excellence," and to ascribe these to the creature, is to provoke a jealous God. Therefore, "give unto the Lord glory and strength; give unto the Lord the glory due to his name." To attract attention to ourselves, is to prove that we are not sent of God; and to give to God the whole glory of this first miracle recorded in the Acts, was the more necessary, as this would stamp its own character on the subsequent events.

2. *The body of Peter's discourse is marked by fidelity.* Ver. 13—18. "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers;" for we are all descended from the patriarchs; and this temple was reared to his honour; "has glorified his *Son* Jesus, both by raising him to the throne, and there giving him the glory arising from this miracle. What a blow to those who had crucified him as a blasphemer, for calling himself the Son of God! They had admired the miracle, and it is now made a halo of glory around the head of the once despised Jesus, "whom you delivered up" to the Gentiles, as Judas had betrayed him to you. "Him you denied in the presence of Pilate, when deciding to liberate him;" and to his question, "Will ye that I release Jesus?" replying, "Not this man, but Barabbas, who was a robber, that in sedition had committed murder!" Thus "ye denied the Holy and the Just;" as ye know him to have been; though he was not suited to your taste; but you "asked to be gratified with a murderer," as a favour. "And the Prince of Life you killed." The original word might be translated, Author, Lord, Ruler, Governor, or Prince; and the apostle Paul uses it where we read, "*Captain* of Salvation." He is "the Author of eternal life to all that obey him;" and you know that he gave life to Lazarus, who had been dead four days.

Do you ask, How could he be the Prince of Life, if we killed him? We answer, "God has raised him from the dead;" and

thus confirmed all His words, who said, "I am come that you may have life: I give my sheep eternal life. I lay down my life for the sheep. No man taketh my life from me; I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." You own that "to God the Lord belong the issues from death." And that God has raised Jesus whom you killed, we are witnesses. Would a holy God give the power of working miracles to false witnesses?

But here is another witness, "this man, whom ye see and know;" whom the name, whom faith in his name, has endued with strength to walk. Did we not, by pronouncing his name, ere we bade the man rise and walk, show a boundless confidence in the efficacy of the name of Jesus, the Messiah of Nazareth? "The faith in his name has given the perfect frame which is here exhibited before you all." Mark how Peter again and again declares the faith in Christ's name by which the miracle was wrought; and calls this the faith which is by him as its Author and Giver.

And now, seeing some begin to melt, and others to argue, the apostle soothes the former by saying, "I know that through ignorance you acted." Not that this made them innocent; for, having the means, knowledge became a duty; and where knowledge is a duty, ignorance is a crime. Still greater, however, would have been their sin; if committed against light and knowledge, and our Lord pleaded on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." But as Christ seemed to charge the rulers with wilful and even unpardonable guilt, in saying, "This is the heir, let us kill him," we are surprised to find the apostle saying, "as did also your rulers;" which, however, may not have applied to all, and even they who knew him to be Messiah, were ignorant of his true glory.

The other class of hearers, who argued against the possibility of the crucified Jesus being the Messiah, are reminded that God foretold his death by the mouth of all his prophets, and thus it was fulfilled. The prediction of a suffering Messiah, in the 53rd of Isaiah, is well known, and has embarrassed the Jews, who turn this way and that, in vain attempts to escape the truth. It is, however, not so easy to see that "*all* the prophets" contain the same testimony; and there may be truth in the conjecture, that the prophets who are spoken of as having

one *mouth*, were, by their *verbal* testimony, known to the Jews to have proclaimed the sufferings of Messiah. Here we have again the doctrine of God's holy decrees announced by prophets, and fulfilled by the sins of men.

3. *The practical application of this discourse was redolent of mercy.* Ver. 19—end. "Repent, therefore," is the language of mercy inspiring hope, as our Lord charged his disciples to preach repentance and remission of sins in his name, beginning at Jerusalem. Conversion is here enjoined, as the fruit of repentance, which is the root. The repentance, or change of mind, is proved genuine, when it produces that conversion which is a change of life. To the broken-hearted penitent it was a healing balm, to hear it said that "your sins may be blotted out." For the fidelity which charged them with killing the Prince of Life, to whom they preferred a murderer, was in perfect harmony with the tenderness and compassion that sought their forgiveness.

They were exhorted to repent, that, instead of this season of awful conviction and faithful accusation; "times of refreshing" mercy might come from the presence of the reconciled God, that would send them, Jesus Messiah, "who was prepared for them," says the Syriac, or "fore-ordained" (Griesbach), unless we translate Griesbach's reading, "previously handled by you." In what sense he might be said to be *sent*, we see from the last verse: "God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you;" that is, in the preaching of the Gospel. For the apostle apprised them, that, upon their penitent and believing reception of the Gospel depended its continuance among them; though for them Christ was foreordained, and to them he was first to be preached. Let them not say, "It is all over with us; Messiah is gone." No: he will come to bless those who repent and believe.

But, lest their gross minds should suppose he would come to *them* in any other way than by his Spirit with his word, they were taught that it was "necessary for the heavens to receive him till the times of restoration of all things, which God had mentioned by the mouth of his holy prophets from the highest antiquity." For the prophets abounding in descriptions of Paradise restored, by the reign of universal righteousness, the Jews expected Elias, as Messiah's forerunner, to restore all

things ; and until this is accomplished, the Lord will not return from heaven to judge the world.

The prophecy of Moses, to which Peter now appeals, we shall notice when it occurs again in the defence of the protomartyr, only reminding you that those words, "like me," may refer to the sufferings of Christ, in which he resembled Moses, cast out to die and afterwards rejected ; but at last introducing a new dispensation. The threat, to destroy those who would not hearken to the promised prophet, was designed to warn them against rejecting him as now preached.

All the prophets, from Samuel, whom the Jews called the master of the prophets, because from his time a succession commenced, told of the days which the Jews now witnessed, of which they could judge, for they were "the children of the prophets," as students, or disciples, just as "wisdom is said to be justified of her children ;" and some of these hearers may have descended from Isaiah, Jeremiah, or other inspired men, whose writings they professed to believe. They were children "of the covenant which God made with *our* fathers," said Peter, claiming brotherhood with them ; as God said to Abraham, "In thy seed shall be blessed all the tribes of the earth." Thus he apprized them that Christ, as the seed of Abraham, would bless all nations ; for it is not true that the apostles, who were sent into all the world, were ignorant of the calling of the Gentiles, though unaware that they would be saved without conformity to the Jewish law.

The last sentence seems to indicate the dawn of that extensive conversion which crowned this sermon ; for what the preacher seemed before (ver. 19) hypothetically to promise, he here repeats, as absolutely conferred : "To you, first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him blessing you, in turning every one from your sins." For where light, attending the Gospel, reveals the glory of Christ, power accompanies the word, breaking, like a hammer, the rocky heart in pieces ; and where grace inspires repentance and the faith of God's elect, there Christ comes, as he himself said, "I will not leave you nor forsake you ; I will come to you ;" meaning, as he himself shows, by the Spirit, which convinces the world. Thus, says the apostle Paul, "Ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me." That he was sent blessing them, was a splendid triumph of grace towards those

who had killed him ; while he was turning them from their iniquities, he was blessing them indeed ; for sin is the parent of the curse, and his name was “ called Jesus because he should save his people from their sins.” Such was the discourse to which the first recorded miracle wrought by the witnesses to Christ’s resurrection gave rise.

To this cure special attention should be paid, for in the history of our religion it is a leading fact. It was wrought on one lame from his birth, and well known as a daily beggar at the most frequented gate of the temple of God. This thing, therefore, was not done in a corner, but amidst a crowd of witnesses, in the most public place ; nor before friends, disposed to believe ; but in the sight of enemies, who are charged with the blood of him in whose name the miracle was wrought ; and they had the mightiest motives for searching to the bottom the evidences of its truth. The man was cured in a moment, and so thoroughly as to become an object of astonishment, though the expectation of the spectators had been awakened by announcing beforehand what was intended to be done, and in what name. Other corroborating circumstances will occur to our notice in the following lecture.

But now mark the discourse, by which the appeal to the senses passes to the understanding, the conscience, and the heart. Here is no proud boasting, but an humble disclaimer of any power or piety in the instruments equal to this wondrous work ; by which they place themselves on common ground, and invite discussion on equal terms. Here is no mystification—no strange technical language, like that of Plotinus—but all is simple narrative ; much of it relates events which the hearers knew to be true, though the story cut them to the heart.

With what artless simplicity and fearless courage, these witnesses to the resurrection of Christ assert the fact, in that place where of all others there was the strongest disposition, and the deepest interest, and the most favourable opportunity, to investigate its truth. Their own faith in it, which could be accounted for by nothing but overwhelming evidence, they had proved by announcing the name of Jesus aloud, as the wonder-working power by which they could venture to preface, and thus to promise, a miracle. They charged their nation, and especially its rulers, with a crime which must create public horror, and draw

down upon the heads of the accusers the execration and the vengeance of all but those whose hearts should melt with contrition, of which it might be thought there was little hope. The mercy which the apostles proclaimed was such as must be spurned by the proud ; for it was to be obtained, only by the name which the Jews had endeavoured to render infamous through an association with the gibbet, and by faith in him whom the enemies boasted they had overcome by the cross.

Faithfulness to Christ is no spite or revenge towards his murderers, as the apostles showed by the earnestness with which they proclaimed the forgiveness of sins to men of Jerusalem, his murderers. The image of the Saviour, in whom mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other, his apostles exhibit ; for, severe and cutting as was their fidelity, equally tender and persuasive was their benevolence. "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out," is the substance of all that eternal mercy says to fallen, guilty man.

If the audience was filled with horror at the charge of having killed the Prince of Life, and the threat which Moses uttered against those who rejected the promised prophet ; the prediction of times of refreshing, and the restoration of all things in this fallen world to the primeval state of purity and bliss, was calculated to exchange despair for hope. Thus we learn to associate the cross with Paradise restored, and to view our Redeemer as retained in heaven till he shall behold the fruits of his death, the travail of his soul, and be satisfied, by seeing heaven upon earth. Meanwhile, we behold him sent to us in the Gospel, in which, when preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, he comes to bless us. For as the Father, having delivered up his Son for our offences, raised him again for our justification ; so he said to him, "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty, and in thy majesty ride prosperously ; because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness ; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things : for thine arrows shall be sharp in the hearts of the king's enemies, whereby the people fall under thee." So truly does he come where his gospel is preached, that he says, "Wherever two or three are assembled in his name, there is he in the midst of them." That he should thus be sent to us in a dispensation of grace, after he had been rejected in his own

personal ministry, was a triumph of mercy like nothing but himself. He has committed to his Spirit the glory of fulfilling that promise,—“I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to me.”

To the children of God's friends this blessing is first sent, which should penetrate their souls with the deepest sense of privilege and obligation. For it is still said to parents who believe, “The promise is to you and to your children.” The children of the prophets and of the covenant made with Abraham, received the benefit of that word of grace which dropped from the Redeemer's lips, when he had quitted death for life, and had not yet quitted earth for heaven, “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in my name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” There the first proclamation of mercy obtained by the blood of atonement shed, was afforded; there the first benefits of the Spirit who bears witness to Christ were enjoyed by thousands, because God shows mercy to thousands of them that love him and keep his commandments. That message of mercy which came so early to the descendants of God's friends, has not reached many parts of the earth, to this day.

Upon the ears of our children the name of Jesus falls with the earliest sound; the preaching of the Gospel is the first public oration of which they are auditors; the method of salvation is the theme of their primeval lesson; and the prayers which they hear us offer in their behalf are the touching favours of heaven, to “open the heart to attend to the things spoken” in the word. This is manifestly the arrangement of a gracious Providence, which should make you say,

“Lord, I ascribe it to thy grace,
And not to chance, as others do,
That I was born of Christian race,
And not a heathen, or a Jew.”

Remember, then, that the Saviour blesses us by turning us from our iniquities, which are our curse and our misery—at once our sin and our punishment. It proves, therefore, the truth and the glory of Christ's religion; that it blesses us by saving us from sin. Mohamedism spread by the sword a religion which promised bliss in a sensual Paradise, adapting the means to the end. But Jesus blesses us when he turns our hearts from sin, by the sight of the cross, and reconciles us to God, who there

proves himself infinite love. When He whose own moral excellence is a boundless source of bliss to himself, becomes the object of our undivided confidence and love, we are made "most blessed for ever."

Rise, children of the righteous, and, with this cured cripple, enter into the temple, walking, leaping for joy, and praising God. If any are literally lame and poor, let them not be discouraged, as though God disregarded them; for here they may behold an apostle taking them by the hand, and a Saviour overruling their position as beggars, to make them rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to those that love him.

This third lecture has shown the miraculous powers of the apostles, in a light that precludes suspicion, and proves that He who sent them gave them power to afford sufficient evidence of the divinity of their mission, and their claim upon our faith.

LECTURE IV.

THE FIRST PERSECUTION OF THE APOSTLES.

ACTS iv. 1—31.

To the tempter of our first parent, God said, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." Then, the unhallowed agreement between earth and hell, which "brought death into the world and all our woe," is broken, and enmity between man and Satan flows from reconciliation between God and man. But the hatred which has convulsed the world reigns in the breasts of that part of mankind who are called the children of the devil, the seed of the serpent, since "he that is born after the flesh persecutes him that is born after the Spirit;" while those who are "counted to the Saviour as a seed," receive from him a precept, confirmed by his own example, to love their enemies. Persecutors and Christians are quite different beings. The first-fruit of the enmity—threatened, shall I say? or promised?—was the murder of Abel by his own brother, at the foot of God's altar; and "wherefore slew he him? because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." The first-fruit of this enmity towards the apostolic church was the imprisonment of Peter and John, for performing a beneficent miracle, and preaching through Christ the forgiveness of sins. But it belongs to the disciples of a crucified Saviour, to do good and receive evil. This first overt act of

persecution against the Christian church was so much an omen of what was to follow, and such a lesson to future ages of the new mode in which our Lord was about to make the cross triumphant, that we should enter on the consideration of it with the most devout interest.

I. THE IMPRISONMENT OF THE APOSTLES, is recorded in the first four verses.

Peter had said to Christ, "I will go with thee to prison and to death;" and our Lord had said to the sons of Zebedee, the father of John, "Ye shall, indeed, drink of the cup that I drink of." And now we see,

1. *The first act of violence, which was the arrest of Peter and John.* "While they were speaking to the people" the gracious words that we have heard, there was a rush in the assembly, and an iron hand was laid on the preachers. Who could be guilty of such violence? Not "the rude fellows of the baser sort;" but the priests, of whom Hosea said, "As troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of the priests murder in the way by consent." They bring with them the captain of the temple, the prefect of the nightly guard of the holy place, whom the Jews called "the man of the mountain of the house." The Sadducees are mentioned, to intimate that this infidel party was then in possession of authority, which they employed to indulge in the enjoyment of this life, as they believed in no other, and were cruel to all who disturbed their ease. They were, therefore, "vexed that the apostles preached, through Jesus, the resurrection from the dead." For if he who was known to have been put to death was alive again, he was "the first fruits of them that slept," and that "man by whom came the resurrection of the dead." You ask, what was there in this to grieve any one? Is the present life so long that we should not wish for another? Or were these rulers so wicked that they suspected a future life must be to them a state of punishment? To wish to die like a dog belongs to those who wish to live like a dog. But, whatever men might think or say of the resurrection from the dead, the question with magistrates should have been, What injury will this do to society? Will men be worse neighbours, or subjects, for believing that, after this life, they will rise, and be judged for the deeds done in the body? And

yet, how many have felt the rude hand of violence for no other crime than teaching the people, and preaching through Jesus the resurrection from the dead!

2. *The first night which the apostles passed in prison is full of interest.* It "was now evening;" for at our three in the afternoon, and the Jews' ninth hour, the apostles wrought the miracle, and they had been a good while preaching, and as there was no time to try them, that day, though it was well known that they would not attempt to escape, they were put in prison, till the next day. See them led along, as prisoners, to the gaol where criminals are lodged, the man once lame, now healed, following, not leaping for joy, but asking in sorrow, "Is it a crime, then, that they have made me walk?" Arrived at the gaol, the authorities demand entrance for two prisoners, who have done—what? good to body and to soul, afforded strength to the infirm, instruction to the ignorant, hope to the guilty. Hear the iron hinges creek; and as the door closes upon the apostles, the hollow sound echoes through the prison; while all their friends are shut out, and these two are left to silence and the night.

Shall we pity them? No; save your pity for their persecutors. For, if you say, "But what must it be for pious men to pass a *first* night in a gaol?" I answer, but they are in a good cause, with a good conscience, and in good company; and with these three attendants a man may lie easy on a cold, hard, stone floor; and in a dreary dungeon, pass a pleasant night. I would rather have shared with them this first taste of the cup of persecution, than have known the first moment of ascent to the throne of the world. For now Peter blesses his Lord, that, instead of denying him, the once feeble disciple can suffer for him; and John feels that he is, indeed, the disciple whom Jesus so loved, as to hand from his own lips the cup of suffering, "that his beloved may drink also." Call them not prisoners; their spirits are not imprisoned, but mount together to the mercy-seat, in prayer for grace to suffer well. They join the songs of the martyrs before the throne, saying, "Thou hast kindly kept us, Lord, from being exalted above measure by the honour of speaking with various tongues, and working miracles of mercy, and turning many hearts to thyself." Such joys require to be chastened by a thorn in the flesh. For they could

not but know, to some extent, that "the word of God was not bound," that "many of those who heard the word believed, and the number of the men became about five thousand." The preacher's eye is keen to observe the anxious looks of one, the tear of repentance starting in the eye of another, and the sigh of a broken heart heaved by a third. The apostles saw that the enemy had snatched up the match, but not till the train was fired, and the blaze had run along a line of five thousand. If these are not counted with, as my translation intimates, but are to be *added* to the three thousand won on the first day, there were now eight thousand; and if the *men* only amounted to such a number, how would it be swollen by the women and children! In these calculations, however, there is nothing sure; nor is it probable that the triumphs of Pentecost were ever surpassed.

If the apostles were kept from sleep, it was for joy of such triumphs. But "he giveth his beloved sleep," which often refuses to shed its balm on royal eyelids, while it rests sweetly on theirs who, exhausted with labours and devotions, sink down, and, like Jacob, though with a stone for a pillow, see visions of God, heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending, in attendance on the heirs of salvation. Thus Bunyan, passing through the wilderness, lighted on a den, where he slept, and saw what myriads have gladly kept awake to read.

II. THEIR COMING FORTH AND TRIAL, extend from the 5th to the 22nd verse.

Here the court, the prisoners' defence, and the council's embarrassment, claim attention.

1. *The court is particularly described, as of importance to the narrative.* "On the morrow morning," the prosecutors came to Jerusalem, which Lightfoot thinks stands here in opposition to the temple, where the Sanhedrim now ceased to meet, in consequence of the disorders of the times. To me, it appears, that the great men lived in the suburbs, and now called a general meeting in the city. The rulers were probably the president and vice-president of the Sanhedrim; the elders were the body of the council; and the scribes, the persons who acted as counsel, and clerks of the court. Annas was the high priest, as

Caiaphas had been. Alexander's name intimates a heathenish Jew ; but he was then a man of note. John is thought to have been the Ben Zacchai, celebrated in the Talmud, who, forty years before the destruction of the temple, saw the gates open spontaneously, and said, "I know thine end;" for Zechariah prophesied, "Open thy gates, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars." "All the kindred of the high priest," who were a species of nobles, were now assembled, as if their dignities were at stake.

No miraculous interposition embarrassed them, for our Lord saw fit to leave two apostles all night in prison ; whence they were quietly brought, and placed in the midst of the circle of this formidable array of enemies, furnished with learning, and armed with might, if not with right. Listen to the examination : "By what power, or by what name, have you done this ? —you ?" For the last word stands as if it were uttered in scorn : "You, fellows, to have done this !" See how "God taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and turneth the counsel of the wicked headlong." For they venture not to deny the fact ; but take it for granted ; as they doubtless recognised the man once lame, and now standing there, healed. The more contemptuously they treat the apostles, as unequal to such a work, the more they glorify Christ. But who ever heard of trying men for the crime of healing in a moment ? Who would think of accusing a physician for curing thoroughly and speedily ? They ask, what name has done it ; as if alluding to the Jews' notion of a magic virtue in the name Jehovah, which modern Jews have affirmed Jesus learned, and by it wrought his miracles. Had the apostles themselves dictated the examination, they could scarcely have made it more to their mind ; for it elicited,

2. *The defence which they made.* Ver. 8—12. There is exquisite sense in Peter's introduction : "If ye, rulers and elders of Israel, a people taught by God, examine us on a good deed done to an infirm man, by whom he has been saved ; be it known to you, and all the people, that it was done in the name of Jesus, the Messiah of Nazareth," whose name we pronounced ere we wrought the cure. You, indeed, condemned him to die on the cross ; but God raised him from the dead, of which the proof is before you ; this man healed by him." The rulers had

asked after the wonder-working name, and they now know more than they wished; for what a stab must this have been to their pride! What a thunder-bolt to their consciences! They, aware that Jesus promised to rise again, had set a guard to prevent, and now are told that a miracle has proved it true.

For the quotation from Psalm cxviii., we must refer to the life of Christ, who had applied it to himself; asking, Have you never read; "the stone which the builders refused, is made the head of the corner"? They had read it in the great Hallel, or Psalms for the Passover; but one said, it applied to Jacob; another, to David; and Aben Ezra says, it speaks of the whole congregation of Israel; while some tell of a literal stone, at first thrown away, and then found fit for a conspicuous place in the second temple. The Jews will admit anything rather than a Messiah once rejected by them. "But this is the Lord's doing, marvellous in our eyes," that there should be "salvation in no other than the Crucified One, whose name alone is given among men that thereby we may be saved." See how Peter turns their attention, from healing bodies, to salvation for the soul. Who sees not here the fulfilment of Christ's promise to his apostles, "When brought before governors and kings, be not anxious what ye shall say, for the Holy Spirit shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say"? What a relief must this promise have afforded to fishermen unaccustomed to the presence of the great, and anxious to honour their Lord! This is not the language of men fretted in body and mind by a night's imprisonment, but of those who are borne away from all consideration of self, by zeal for a Saviour's glory, and benevolent solicitude for the salvation of their fellow-men, even though these were their deadly foes.

3. *The council's embarrassment arose from the sight of the apostles and of the man they had cured.* "Seeing the boldness, or freedom, of Peter and John," who spoke like men at their ease, and "conceiving them illiterate and private," not "ignorant" men, the rulers could not account for their unembarrassed air. They were not among the literati, nor in any public office, but in private secular life; and they were known to have been with Jesus, who was neither in high station himself, nor attended by those who were; for it was asked, "Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed on him?" That this was

supposed to account for their boldness is often assumed; but nothing more than the simple fact is recorded, that during the examination they were recognised as Christ's companions; of which we may make use by recalling his words, "Ye also shall bear witness of me, because ye have been with me from the beginning." But the man who was healed was another embarrassing sight, to which the council had nothing to reply. How came he there? Had he watched all night at the prison doors, praying that God would cause it to be said of the apostles, as of Joseph, "he was in prison, but the Lord was with him"? When the doors were opened in the morning, to bring them forth, did he greet them with his blessing, and follow them to the council, to show that he could walk, and to declare that he owed it to them? It was to his credit to be there; for to all whom Christ has healed, he says, "Ye are my witnesses."

The embarrassment of the council induced them to order all others out of the hall, ashamed to say before them, "What shall we do to these men?" It is, indeed, difficult to know what to do with men who are tried for their good deeds; and still more with men who can work miracles. Often have persecutors seized their victims and then knew not what to do with them. "That a notable miracle has been done by them is manifest to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny." Then, why not yield to the inference, that you have crucified the Son of God; and though you once refused the chosen corner-stone, now repent, believe, and build upon it? But no; not a thought of the kind is entertained by them; for they are evidently unprincipled men, who care not for truth or religion. Hence, with a confounding coolness, they plot to smother a miracle, that it may not, from the capital, spread further among the people; as if the knowledge of it were an infectious plague. "Let us threaten them, that they may no more speak in this name, nor teach in the name" of Jesus. Thus commenced a long course of threats and orders, not less impious than vain. This was overruled, to bring out to view the great principle of religious liberty. For "Peter and John answered, Whether it is right before God to hearken to you, rather than to God, judge ye." We consider ourselves before God's tribunal, and when he has made us witnesses to Jesus; and you command us to be silent; between these two conflicting authorities, judge, ye judges, which should prevail? If we obey

you, we set you up above God. Is this right? Where God had not given counter orders, as in the affairs of this life, it is admitted that the governments should be obeyed; but where God has spoken, as in the affairs of religion, he must be obeyed; though rulers threaten and forbid. From this time, Christ is declared to be the paramount Ruler in religion, that his disciples have their orders from him; and that he must be obeyed, whoever may forbid. In fact, those who countermand, order impossibilities, bid us hold the winds in our fist, and control the tides. "It is impossible for us not to speak what we have seen and heard." Not to speak at all to any man in the name of Jesus! Bid us, neither breathe nor think! What we have seen and heard is such that it must come out, though death threaten us in its fiercest forms! A religion of ceremony may be put down by brute force; but to hide the love of Jesus is as impossible as to "hide the ointment of your right hand." Having, therefore, threatened again what terrible things the council would do, that it might look big, even in defeat; they let the apostles go. Not that the foe would have stopped here; but that the people made it dangerous to punish; for they "all glorified God, for what had been done; for the man was above forty years old on whom this miracle of healing was wrought;" so that his case was hopeless as to human aid; and he had been known to everybody during that time.

Thus ended the first act of persecution, and thus commenced the triumph of religious freedom. Two laymen, as these fishermen would now be called, say to the ecclesiastical authorities, You have the sword, and we have the word. You say, "Silence!" Heaven says, "Speak." Let your own conscience tell which should be obeyed: as for us, we can do nothing in religion but what God commands. Freedom to speak what we deem to be the truth is thus established as a Christian claim, and persecution for doing so is branded as an anti-Christian crime. An impotent attempt has been made to escape this conclusion, by affirming that none but those who work miracles have a right to propagate any other than the established religion. Now, there never was any other religion established by divine authority and armed with the powers of the state, but this which threatened the apostles, and which they refused to obey; for it was now superseded by a new dispensation, which knows no force, but that of truth and grace.

To require miracles, as an authority for opposing an established religion, is to condemn all the reformers, who wrought no miracles; and all the Protestant churches in the world; and all the early Christians too. For it was, after miracles had ceased, that Christians overthrew the established religions of the heathen world. Nor could Rome maintain this argument, which would condemn their missionaries, who wrought no miracles, and would prohibit all future attempts to propagate Christianity in Mohamedan, or Pagan lands. The apostles exhibited miracles as heaven's seal to the truth of their testimony, but rested not on them for their authority to speak.

III. THE LIBERTY OF THE APOSTLES WAS IMPROVED IN A MANNER WORTHY OF THE MEN AND OF THEIR CAUSE.

Earth and heaven exhibit scenes full of instruction.

1. *On earth, the two confessors, "being let go, returned to their own company."* Ver. 23—30. A night in gaol, and fierce threats of what the authorities would do, had wrought no change, except to increase their attachment to a cause that could not be gained; and when restraint was taken off, as the bird whose string is cut soars away to its nest, they returned to their own company. Oh, to have seen them enter! To have heard them tell what the priests had said when, in private, they threatened! Of the sufferings of a night in gaol, they say, they think, nothing. The threats, however, call forth a united prayer to God, whom they address as "Sovereign, who had made heaven, and earth, and sea, and all that is in them," expressing their submission to his Sovereign pleasure, and their confidence in him as the Almighty Creator. They quote the second Psalm, as "spoken by him, though by the mouth of his servant David." The exposition of the words belongs to the commentator on the Psalms, but its fulfilment deserves special notice. "In this city" (Syriac) Griesbach shows to be a part of the text; and it is remarkable that, "in Jerusalem, there had been of a truth collected, Herod the King, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, and the Gentiles, and the people of Israel," which could not have been anticipated when David, a thousand years before, said, "Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?" The kings of the earth stood up and the rulers took counsel together against Jehovah and against his Messiah, "thy holy

Son Jesus, whom thou hast anointed ;” for where we read in the Psalms, “ I have set my king on Zion’s holy hill,” the apostles say *anointed* ; the true rendering of the Hebrew. The word *child*, which our translators have employed here, and in the close of the 30th verse, savours of Popish superstition, which exhibits the Saviour as a little child, in the images and pictures of the Virgin and Child. The Greek word *παῖς* they had properly translated servant in the 25th verse ; and here they should have rendered it “ son,” as they did the Hebrew in the Psalm which is quoted : “ Thou art my Son.” This assemblage of kings and rulers, heathens and Jews, in the holy city, plotting the death of Christ, was but “ to do what the hand of God accomplished, as his counsel had decreed it.” The apostolic prayer, thus introduced, was, “ Now, Lord, look how they threaten ; and leave us not to quail before their threats : but grant to thy servants, with all the freedom of boldness, to speak thy word.” They had astonished the enemy by this very courage ; but they knew themselves too well to trust to this ; for he that was a hero in the last battle may turn coward in the next ; and therefore, again, they ask for boldness. “ He giveth more grace ;” and they who ask it are the men who endure to the end. Oh learn the lesson here taught, that all your solicitude, in the time of trial, should be directed towards a right state of mind. For what signify threats, or tortures ? All that which hurts us is from ourselves. Whatever we bear well ends well.

The apostles ask that “ God’s hand might still be stretched forth to heal ;” though one such display of power had cost them one night in gaol ; for they had no objection to another. “ That signs and wonders should be done by the name of thy holy Son Jesus,” was their prayer ; that thus they might be emboldened to speak the word, which was the consecrated instrument of the Spirit of grace ; though miracles roused men to hear the word and proved it true. Again : attention to an apostolic prayer becomes us. Mark its Scriptural character ; a large portion is the word of God ; its high rationality ; for the Psalm quoted is not misapplied ; its deep humility, with its lofty bearing ; its superiority to self ; with its consecration to the divine honour ; and then say whether these men were either deceivers or deceived ? If we pray like apostles, shall we not wisely adapt our prayers to occasions as they arise ?

2. *Heaven responded to earth ; for, they having thus prayed, a second Pentecost followed.* As in the first, a mighty sound, like a roaring wind, roused attention ; so now, an earthquake, which shook the place where they were assembled, spoke the descending God. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, in new and more abundant measures. For though the most recent converts may now have received what they had never before experienced of miraculous influence, it seems that an immediate answer was sent to those who asked boldness to withstand the threats they had heard. Rich recompense for bonds and imprisonments, for a trial at the bar, and all the terrific threats of the foe ! If the apostles, or, at least, any in the church, had been disappointed because no angel had opened the prison-doors, they now found that better things had been kept in reserve ; for the church received its leaders back with new blessings on their souls. They asked for courage, and they received it ; and though threatened if they spoke again, “ they spake the word with all boldness.” Friends of religion, this is the way to conquer.

Let their testimony, then, sink down into your hearts, that “ there is salvation in no other name, but that of Jesus the Crucified.” What have we to do with speculations on the salvation of those who know not that name ? What, though they will not be condemned for not believing in a name they never heard, does it follow that they will not be condemned on other grounds ? Exchange your cold, barren, speculative charity, for the genuine practical benevolence that sends, through the wide earth, the only name under heaven whereby we must be saved. But, first, beware lest, by trusting to anything in yourselves, you stake your own name against that of Jesus.

When you have believed, and found salvation in it, you will show the attraction of affinity as they did, who, “ being let go, returned to their own company.” Nothing but brute force can keep Christians apart from each other. When this is withdrawn, they return to the church, as naturally “ as doves fly in clouds to their windows.” Thus, when the bonds of the flesh are dissolved, their spirits shall return to the God who gave them, and to “ the spirits of the just made perfect, in the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven.”

Triumphant is the testimony of Jesus against all the terrors of persecution : which is a blunt weapon, that has ever failed of its

object, from the hour that these apostles were let go, to this moment. As rulers, and kings, and high priests, are here shown to be the last persons to be entrusted with dominion in religion; so the simple peasant, on whom God sheds his Spirit, is proved able to defy the mace of authority and the sword of state. Our religion, cradled and rocked in the storm, shall ride on the whirlwind to universal empire. To forbid us to speak, may befit those whose cause requires the silence of night; but the prayer of faith can bring down that Spirit who shakes the earth, who fills the heart with holy courage, and gives tongues of fire, to speak "the word which will have free course and be glorified." If preachers be imprisoned, "the word of God is not bound."

As it is from this inspired history of the erection of the Christian church that we are to learn its external relations and internal devotions, I make no apology for looking back again on the two chief themes of the chapter.

1. *The apostles' contest with the government.* That the Christian religion "puts us in mind to obey magistrates, charging every soul to be subject to the higher powers," is not only a great truth, but a high consolation. It settles a question of the utmost importance to every conscientious man. But that this obedience is confined to the affairs of this life, and that religion is the domain of Christ alone, is clear, not only from the Epistle to the Romans, but from the fact that our religion was propagated in defiance of the authorities of the earth, whether Jewish or heathen. He that gathered thousands into the church in a few days, could have bowed kings first to his sceptre, and armed his religion with the authority of the state. But he chose to leave it to its own spiritual power; that while governors forbade apostles to speak in his name, this should be the reply, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken to you more than to God, judge ye; we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." How are we to escape this undesirable conflict—this imputation of resisting the powers that be? By no other way than by each party keeping within its own province; the civil government confining itself to the administration of temporal affairs; and the church of Christ limiting its interference to the concerns of the soul, religion, and eternity. If ever an amalgamation of church and state was to be made, it should have been when there were inspired

apostles, to give it the sanction of Divine authority, to settle the terms of the alliance with the consummate wisdom which this required, and to give to future ages a pattern of the just working of the complicated system. But as our Lord suffered his apostles to leave the church independent of the state, and made it, in that apparently defenceless form, victorious over a hostile world; it is impious, beyond all power of expression, for mortals to give up the church to the control of the state, and to bind together what Christ left separate, pretending that they know better what is for the good of each party than he who entrusted magistrates with the sword which pierces the body, and committed to his church the word that sways the soul. The abandonment of that heavenly charter of religious freedom, which Peter here pleaded; for the sake of the power and purse of the state, is the grand reason why Christianity is, at this moment, scarcely more extended than when Constantine presided in the Council of Nice, as *summus episcopus*, a title which I heard some Prussian ministers give to their king.

2. *The prayer of the apostolic church*, a second time affords instruction. We have already observed, that the first Christian prayer recorded in this inspired history was evidently suggested by the occasion, and adapted to it; and who can deny that the second is marked by the same characters? The Scriptures, which the apostle here quotes, teach us that the Bible is the true prayer-book, suggesting not only proper petitions, but right words; for how can we learn what we should say to God better than from that book in which he speaks to us? Beyond this, the New Testament teaches no aid to prayer, but the promised influence of "the Spirit of grace and supplication, who maketh intercession in the saints according to the will of God, teaching both how to pray, and what things to pray for as we ought." All that supersedes this, by words of human dictation to the church, is not aid, but hindrance. The Lord's prayer, which has been called a prescribed form, was never, if we judge from the New Testament, employed as such by the apostles. And how could we employ it? For who is to judge between the form given by Matthew, which contains about fifty words, and that by Luke, which has only about thirty? How could there be united prayer by these forms, when one would have finished while the other was in the midst? The whole of the

Doxology, or ascription of kingdom, power, and glory, is wanting in the ancient manuscripts. Every departure from Scripture is a step into the maze of error, folly, and corruption. Be it our study, then, to pray like the apostolic church, whose praying opened heaven and shook the earth.

Looking back, a fourth time, on our progress, we find a public act of the government, in imprisoning and trying the apostles, affording proof that our religion was notoriously propagated in the time and the place that give best evidence of its truth.

LECTURE V.

THE SIN AND PUNISHMENT OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA.

ACTS iv. 32—v. 16.

MONEY, in some hands, being called “filthy lucre,” has acquired a profane character ; and that it should have been introduced into Christ’s holy empire may excite surprise. But as long as man needs food, and raiment, and habitation, money, which is a mere representative of these necessities of life, must be an object of consideration, exhibiting human wisdom or folly, sanctity or sinfulness, by the estimation in which we hold what must pass through our hands, but must not have our hearts. “For the love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Fanatical and false is the pretence to do without money ; for monks who have made a duty or a merit of poverty have contradicted themselves by becoming what are called begging friars, who spend a large portion of their lives in little else than asking for money. It should excite no surprise, then, that the religion of Jesus, which is a reasonable service, makes no pretensions to what is impracticable, but introduces into its earliest records a question of finance, for the instruction and information of the Church in every future age.

But money is a touch-stone of character ; and, as after a gathering comes a sifting, the liberality of genuine Christians

becomes the innocent occasion of bringing out to view the fact, which, however painful, might be expected, that among thousands of early converts there were some hypocrites. We have, therefore, to consider, to-day—

I. THE LIBERALITY OF CHRISTIANS.

Those specimens which were previously recorded I have reserved for this lecture, that I may here exhibit the prevailing spirit of the Church, as well as the particular instance mentioned at the close of the last chapter, which seems to have given rise to the melancholy display of hypocrisy.

1. *The prevailing spirit of the Church should be well understood.* Chap. iv. 32. Though the Sanhedrim had decreed that, if any owned Jesus for the Messiah, they should be put out of the synagogue, which cut them off from the charities of life, we are assured that none of the Christians were left destitute; for, among the thousands who believed, some were possessors of lands or houses, which they sold for the relief of the poor. Who could, at such a time, suffer a Christian brother to starve? Peter had, in a former sermon, taught them that riches have wings, by showing them a thunder-cloud which shortly burst over their land, from which the nation was swept as with the besom of destruction. Their property, therefore, they sold, and brought the prices and “laid them at the apostles’ feet, and distribution was made to every man as he had need.” This proved so sufficient, that though “God has chosen the poor of this world rich in faith,” there was enough for all. And when has not the Church of God enough, if it has but faith and love enough rightly to use it? For “godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come.”

You will perceive that I have ascribed everything to common Christian principle, and nothing to any special law of community of goods, which we shall shortly see had no existence. Though Lightfoot thinks this was the year of Jubilee, when the lands and houses sold fetched a high price, I suspect the law of Jubilee had fallen into desuetude under Herod and the Romans.

2. *The particular instance recorded is that of Barnabas.* Ver. 36. This person we shall frequently meet in the progress of the history. As a Jew, he was called Joses; in the Syriac, Joseph; but, though a Levite, he was of a family that had settled

in the Isle of Cyprus, whither many of his nation had emigrated, to escape the troubles of their country and age. He had an estate, probably in Judea, from the facility with which he sold it, and brought the price to lay it at the apostles' feet. This has been supposed to induce the apostles to call him "Son of Consolation," for the solace he afforded to the poor. But he seems to have been *previously* called Barnabas, which, in Hebrew, signifies the son of prophècy, or preaching; as the Greek also should be rendered, Son of Exhortation, he being distinguished as a public speaker. He is said to have been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, which, if true, may have contributed to his intimacy with a fellow-student, Saul of Tarsus, with whom Barnabas laboured for the conversion of his native Isle of Cyprus. To the wisdom of God it seemed fit that one, at least, of the earliest evangelists should possess an estate, and part with it for Christ's sake and the Gospel's, that he might be an example, as well as a teacher, of liberality and superiority to the love of this world. This, however, seems, by the connexion, to have given rise to the melancholy event which leads us to display—

II. THE DETECTION AND PUNISHMENT OF HYPOCRISY. Chap. v. 1, &c.

The distinction which Barnabas early acquired in the church was naturally promoted by his liberal conduct, and as naturally awakened an unholy emulation in those who longed for the honour, but had not a heart for the sacrifice. For "think not that the Scripture saith in vain, There is a spirit in man that lusteth to envy." We turn, therefore, to—

1. *The conduct of an unhappy couple.* The name of the husband, Ananias, being common among the Jews, we have met with before; and as Sapphira, also, is a Hebrew name, we conclude they were both native Israelites, though, alas! "they are not all Israel who are of Israel." "He sold a possession," *but* (ah, that but!) instead of devoting, like others, the whole proceeds to the necessities of the poor saints, "he secretly retained some of the money; his wife, also, being privy to the fact." Why did she not say, "No; into this secret come not thou, my soul"? Wives, be not partakers of your husbands' sins. You are one flesh, but you have two souls, to be separately saved or lost for ever. By refusing to share in his sin, "how knowest

thou, O wife, but thou mayest save thy husband?" They must have known each other's character, or they would not have trusted each other in this disgraceful affair. They were, like our first parents, too well agreed in hearkening to the tempter.

Sufficiently convinced of the truth of Christianity to make some sacrifice for it, they both wanted that experimental acquaintance with its nature which produces "truth in the inward parts," and sacrifices all for Christ. Such Christians have, since that time, become too common; and the Scriptures here honestly declare that there were such in the earliest church; for the word of God never sanctions that idolatry of the primitive Christians which has since prevailed. The name of Christian some obtain because they are not Jews, not Pagans, not Mussulmans, nor professed Deists, but admit Christianity to be true; and yet are no more Christians than an empty shell is a nut. Ananias and Sapphira serve to show that, when it is said "the multitude were of one heart," we must not suppose they were all of one character; but that no difference had yet appeared. For as, among the twelve, there was a Judas, so, amidst the thousands that believed, there were some who, pretending to the liberality which others felt, brought a part of the price of that estate which they sold, affirming that it was the whole, agreeing together in this deceitful trick, as if they said, "May I not do what I will with my own?" We ask with astonishment, Did they not say to each other, "This will come out; for the purchasers of the property will not lie for us"? Too well they agreed in life, and in death were not divided. "But their hearts were divided between God and mammon, so were they found faulty." The first stroke of judgment was—

2. *The death of the husband.* Ver. 2—6. See him bringing the part which he had found in his heart to spare, say sixty pounds out of a hundred, piquing himself on rivalling Barnabas, and exulting in superior policy, yclept prudence. He lays down his deceitful offering at the apostles' feet; but, ah! there is one present who says, "All the churches shall know that I am he who searches the heart, to give to every one according to his deeds." Peter, therefore, makes no inquiry; but, at once, says, "Ananias, why has Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and keep back part of the price?" Some may suppose there was an air of dishonesty about the sinner; that what his lips, or his hands,

told, his looks belied ; that some flush of the countenance, some curl of the lip, or retreating glance of an eye afraid to meet the apostle's eye, betrayed the secret : so difficult it is for a man to lie all over. But such intimations would, to the charity that thinketh no evil, justify nothing more than inquiry into the fact, and Peter asks after the cause, "Why Satan had filled his heart ;" a Hebrew phrase for daring or resolution, which is so charged on Satan that the sinner is asked why the tempter has done it. For the heart being found empty of right principles, Satan filled it with evil resolutions. The sin of lying to the Holy Ghost is charged on him who intended practically to lie to men ; as David, who had sinned both against Bathsheba and Uriah, exclaimed, "O God, against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." When will men learn, that, in all their dealings with their fellow-creatures, they have to do with a heart-searching God, who considers the lie they tell to each other as told to him ? Especially in the Church, the empire of conscience and religion, and the temple of the Holy Spirit, is sincerity required ; for he who is not, in his inmost spirit, before God, the Christian that he professes to be before men, stakes his soul against omniscience, and provokes a jealous God to unmask him before all the world.

Keeping back part sinned against Numb. xxx. 2 ; Deut. xxiii. 21 ; Eccles. v. 4. Peter appealed to Ananias ; that there was no excuse for these *deceits* ; for "while the property remained unsold, was it not thine own ?" and "after it was sold, was it not under thine own authority," or control ? Here you have a complete refutation of the notion that a community of goods was enjoined in the primitive church. Though "no one said that aught which he possessed was his own ; but they had all things common ;" the philosopher who said "Friends have all things common," meant not to affirm a community of goods among friends, or the destruction of the rights of property. In common life, we say not to our friends, "What we possess is our own ;" rather, "It is all yours ;" "Make yourselves at home ;" but they never understand it as entitling them to say, "It is as much mine as yours." Peter declares, "It was your own ;" and if Scripture is best interpreted by Scripture, the sacred historian merely says, the possessors of property thought less of their claim to it, than of the pleasure they took in im-

parting it for the common good. But no man said of another's property, "It is mine." Even when the possession was sold, the money was under the control of Ananias, and was not supposed to belong to the church; so that his sin consisted in keeping back part, while affecting to give all. He might have kept the whole, and honestly avowed it; but in pretending to sell, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the property and give all to God, when he laid only a part at the apostles' feet, he was a hypocrite.

The contributions afterwards made for the poor, show that there was no other community of goods in the primitive church, than that which is obligatory on all Christians, in similar circumstances, at all times. "For if a brother, or a sister, be naked, or destitute of daily food, and we, having it in our power, give them not the things needful for the body, how dwelleth the love of God in us?"

The Scriptures, when placing two things side by side, affirm or deny the one absolutely, though the intention is to do so comparatively. "Thou hast lied to God, rather than man."

Peter uttered no threat; but down dropped Ananias, and expired! Unless the same Spirit that inspired the apostle with a knowledge of the sin, apprised him of the intended doom, he must have been alarmed as well as shocked at the sight of the man dying "with a lie in his right hand." This was the finger of God!

We cannot be surprised that "great fear seized all that heard these things." What a melancholy reverse of the scene which had preceded! For, after miracles of mercy had become so common, behold, "God is doing his strange work!" Who would have expected that the corpse of a professed Christian, smitten with the thunderbolt of wrath, would be seen lying in the church, to teach that "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all that are round about him"? Woe to him that sins against the Holy Ghost. Matt. xii. 31, 32. But as Jehovah said of the guilty, smitten sons of Aaron, "Take up these sinners against their own souls;" the dead must not lie "amongst the living in Jerusalem." "The young men rose and wound him up, and carrying him out, buried him." The younger men were employed where some strength was required; and the winding up

may have included that inferior kind of embalming, of which we read in the case of our Lord, who was "wrapped up in linen, with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury;" though they interred Christ hastily, in a sepulchre which was nigh at hand, because the Sabbath drew nigh; and the more complete embalming was deferred, till after the Sabbath. But if we are surprised at the haste, so contrary to our notions of decency and propriety, the variety in funeral customs of different nations and ages must be brought to remembrance, as well as the peculiar law under which the Jews lived. "If a man of Israel were hung for a crime, he must be taken down and buried the same day, lest the curse of God seem to rest on the holy land;" and the case of Ananias might be thought to have been that of a criminal executed by the immediate hand of God. But the Jews were always hasty in their interments, burying a person, if possible, the day he died; for by the law a dead body defiled everything, and it was necessary to remove it from the vicinity of the living. See the melancholy train moving towards the grave, and say with the wise man, "I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone to the place of the holy. This also is vanity."

3. *The consummation of the judgment, in the death of the wife.* That "she came in, about three hours after, not knowing what had happened," increases our surprise. What! her husband dead and buried, and she not know it? But several considerations may diminish the mystery. The burying-ground was in the suburbs; for in the Holy City none but the kings of the house of David were interred. The cemeteries were said to be a mile and a half from any town, and probably more from Jerusalem, that all danger of defilement to the living might be removed far from the temple of God. As Sapphira seems to have been not in Jerusalem, when her husband sinned and died, she may have been, by agreement between them, to avoid the appearance of collusion, in the country, on the side opposite to that where their cemetery lay. And those on the North of London may come in, profoundly ignorant of what has just happened in their own family, on the South.

Peter *questioned* Sapphira; though he had at once charged her husband with his crime. "Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much;" mentioning the sum which Ananias brought

as the whole; and she said, "Yes, for that sum." Did the question of an apostle wake up no warning from conscience? Alas! she had committed herself to her husband, and she would not betray him! He had agreed with her to say *that* was the price, and she would say so, too. Often, the providence of God, and the voice of conscience, open a door for repentance and escape; but the sinner says, "No, I will go on; it is too late to retreat." Peter, therefore, asks, "How is it that it was agreed between you to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" It may be replied, they certainly did not say to each other, "We will tempt the Spirit of the Lord." This may be granted: but then it should be recollected, that to tempt signifies to try. Every sinner who makes up his mind to a crime, has some fear that God sees and disapproves, and may detect, or punish. But the intentional, when become the actual sinner, says, on the other hand, "Perhaps not; but I will try." Now this trying God, whether he is omniscient, holy, and an avenger of iniquity, is an insult to his majesty, and he may determine to avenge.

At this moment, did Peter see, or hear, the young men returning from the funeral of the husband? Prompted by that Spirit who had shown himself present, the apostle, who had not foretold the event to Ananias, said to Sapphira, "Behold, the feet of those who have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out to thy grave." What omniscience predicted, omnipotence fulfilled. "She fell down instantly at his feet, and expired. The young men whose feet were at the door, entered, and found her dead;" a second spectacle, more awful, in many respects, than the first. A wife is often, when implicated with her husband in crime, excused, presuming that his authority left her not at liberty. But God, who searches the heart, here pronounced her equal in guilt, by making her equal in doom. "They wound her up, therefore, and carried her out, and buried her by the side of her husband." Alas! it could not be said, "Very pleasant were they in life, and in death they were not divided;" but, partners in iniquity, they were companions in doom. The morning saw the husband borne to the grave; the evening, the wife. There write on their tomb, "Here lie Ananias and Sapphira, struck dead in the church for lying to God. Go, traveller, and remember for thyself, and tell to others, that God cannot be deceived, and will not be mocked. For God

is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence by all them that are round about him."

That great fear fell upon the whole church, we were prepared to hear ; for, one after another dropping down dead there, must have called forth the cry, " It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God ! For who can stand in thy sight, when once thou art angry ?" But the *souls* of the sinners ! How can we follow them to that eternity into which this guilty pair were summoned, with a lie in their right hand ? But I am arrested by the reflection, that to pursue this train of thought is to offend against the instructive silence of my text. It has told of the death, the burial, of the sinners ; but it leaves the tomb to close upon them, without affrighting us by the image of their departing spirits, their appearance at the great tribunal, and their entrance on the scene exhibited in the Revelations : " All liars shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." And when the pit has shut her mouth on the wicked, silence may be most instructive to the living ; as well as most accordant with the modesty and benevolence which become those who know that " the judgments of God are a great deep, and his ways past finding out."

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS.

These were twofold—alarming and soothing ; for the world was smitten with awe, and the church was cheered with grace.

1. *On the world*, the effect was what might have been expected : " great fear fell on all them that heard these things ; and of the rest durst no man join the church."

Two such deaths, followed by their funerals, could not fail to excite notice ; to become a theme of conversation, and to draw forth many comments. " We have called these people hypocrites," some would say ; " and we find there may be hypocrites in the church ; but these are now proved to be the exceptions, which show that sincerity is the rule. The Christian church is no place for hypocrites, whatever it may be for enthusiasts." If a few affected to say, " Ah, they are all alike," none thought so. Of the rest of mankind, therefore, no one durst join himself to them who believed in Jesus and formed the church, for the people magnified them ; so that though the Christians met " with one accord in Solomon's porch," strangers to their faith

stood aloof, with respectful fear. Ananias and Sapphira had too lightly taken up their profession of religion ; but no one now ventured to say, from trivial or impure motives, " I will join the Christians." For the power of the apostles struck the world with awe ; though the church knew that it was the presence of their Lord which wrought the righteous judgments they had seen. This was, however, a salutary effect ; for it prevented the Christians from outgrowing their strength, and frightened them from that to which we are all too prone, glorying in mere numbers, the world's glory, in which it outshines the church ; while, in the purity of our communion, lies our glory and our strength. If the lioness has but one cub, that one is a lion. " Happy art thou, O Israel ; who is like unto thee, when thou art a people saved of the Lord ?" and it is said, " The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations."

2. *On the church*, a soothing effect was produced, when, " by the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were wrought among the people, insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits : and they were healed every one." These beneficent miracles cheered the minds of the brethren who had been wounded and alarmed at the sight of corpses smitten by the bolt of heaven, and were ready to exclaim, " What will the world say ?" " Will they not be repelled from us, and dread our assembly as an Aceldama, a field of blood ?" It was now, however, seen that judgment is a strange work among us, and that mercy still triumphs where Jesus reigns. The multitudes that were added to the Lord are said to have been composed both of men and women ; as if to assure us, that, though a woman, as well as a man, had been smitten with death ; women as well as men saw the judgment in a right light, and " joined themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant never to be forgotten." Let not the church, then, dread the fidelity that is necessary to purity ; for that will never be injurious to its interests ; but will, under the care of its Lord, attract, though the policy of the world would say, " It must repel." When the wicked are put away from the church, the remaining half is more

than the whole. The streets of Jerusalem, full of beds whereon the sick lay, eager to catch even the shadow of Peter as bringing health, may have reminded some of the words of Christ: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do, shall he do, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to the Father." We never, indeed, read of this, in the life of Christ; and it is implied, if not expressed, that the shadow of Peter did heal the sick, which was such an honour to a mortal that he must have needed all the humbling recollections of his fall, to keep him in his right place. But Christ sent his healing power where his shadow was not thrown, and the "greater things" which apostles wrought were the conversion of a world, and the formation of churches among the Gentiles.

Look, from the lofty rock on which Jerusalem was built, and see how the roads leading up to that metropolis are animated with crowds bearing their sick friends, and those who are vexed with unclean spirits, to bring them to the place of assembly, where life and death are dispensed, and where presides the man whose very shadow is health. Nor was their labour vain. For they who were afflicted, whatever was their disease, "were healed every one." The terrors of judgment were absorbed in the triumphs of healing grace. Instead of the hypocrites cast out, see hosts of the sincere gathered in.

1. *Let us banish from our mind all thought of two kinds of religion*; one for what are called primitive Christians, and another for ourselves; a most immoral notion, which encourages some to content themselves with an inferior thing supposed to be sufficient for safety, leaving to extraordinary persons what is essential to sanctity. The first believers were under no other law than that which binds all Christians, in every age. Property had the same rights among them; and charity has the same claims among us. The estates and the money of the earliest Christians were under their own control; for the only law which prevailed was that of love, which still rules wherever faith exists. The Christians who are, at this day, faithfully devoting their property to God, would, if placed in like circumstances with the first believers, do as they did; and they who would not, are but proofs that all the Ananiases and Sapphiras are not yet dead and buried. For, while we have dwelt on the lie which brought down the judgment, we should trace the whole affair up

to the sin of keeping back part of what we owe to God. "The love of money was the root of all the evil ; and covetous men, who are idolaters, have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ." We here learn that a covetous can scarcely be an honest man.

2. *Cultivate sincerity, which is the parent of many virtues, as covetousness of many sins.* Meditate on the 139th Psalm, till you cry aloud, "Search me, O God, and know my heart ; try me, and know my thoughts ; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Teach your children sincerity by your own example ; for they are quick-sighted, they see through us, and judge of religion by what they know of us. Let not your solicitude for their salvation be severed, for a moment, from warnings against false profession. Never urge them to say what they do not mean ; but teach them to entertain a horror of lying, even to man, and much more to God. As they should learn when young, so should *we* often repeat, when old, the Divine Song in which Watts has so well improved the narrative of this chapter :—

"Oh 'tis a lovely thing for youth
To walk betimes in wisdom's way,
To fear a lie, to speak the truth,
That we may trust to all they say !

"But liars we can never trust,
Though they should speak the thing that's true ;
And he that does one fault at first,
And lies to hide it, makes it two.

"Have we not known, nor heard, nor read,
How God abhors deceit and wrong ?
How Ananias was struck dead,
Caught with a lie upon his tongue ?

"So did his wife Sapphira die,
When she came in, and grew so bold
As to confirm that wicked lie
That just before her husband told.

"The Lord delights in them that speak
The words of truth ; but every liar
Must have his portion in the lake
That burns with brimstone and with fire.

"Then let me always watch my lips,
Lest I be struck to death and hell,
Since God a book of reck'ning keeps
For every lie that children tell."

3. *Mark the wisdom which commenced the evangelical, as well as legal, dispensation, with a miracle of judgment, as a faithful warning to every future age.* Of that which occurred when the Levitical worship was set up, we read, Leviticus x. 1—7: “And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them; and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace. And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel, the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp. So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said. And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled. And ye shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die; for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you. And they did according to the word of Moses.” Israel were taught thus, not to trifle with the ordinances of worship, which they had just received from heaven.

And now the Christian Church learned, that even the dispensation of grace was guarded round with the terrors of a heart-searching God, that we might “have grace to serve God, with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire.”

4. *Let us, however, dwell on the tenderness of our Redeemer in following this judgment with favours,* so beneficent and abundant, that the distinctive character of our religion was sustained in all its glory. The miseries of men were relieved; the apostles were exhibited as ministers of grace; the world that was awed, was also won, converted, and gathered into the church, in multitudes, both of men and women. “The law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” For the grace was designed to render the truth amiable, and the truth to preserve the grace from becoming contemptible. It was

mercy, to keep the rest of mankind from joining themselves to the church. For only when we are called by grace out of the world, and separated from the rest, is it safe, either for the church, or for ourselves, to be joined together. "Let the sinners in Zion be afraid; let fearfulness surprise the hypocrites, saying, Who can endure devouring fire?"

O Peter! who maketh thee to differ? Once thou didst lie to men, and virtually to God; but thou hast obtained mercy, repentance, and forgiveness. "Has not the potter power over the clay, to make one vessel to honour and another to dishonour?"

5. *But the very judgment is turned into mercy; and "the fear which came on every soul" may give us hope.* For if, hitherto, the Christian church looked more like an assembly of angels, than of men; we now learn that the detection of hypocrites among us should not lead to the conclusion, that we are utterly unlike the churches of the saints. No: there were anciently, not only sincere Christians, like gold, silver, precious stones; but also those that were as wood, hay, stubble. Then, indeed, the church is unlike that of the apostles, when we obey not the word, "Put away from you the wicked person." For we may be led to ask, "Are there few that be saved?" Only one nation knew the true God; only the Christian church in that nation knew the Messiah, whom he sent; and not all, even in that church, were Christians indeed.

It is now the fifth time that we are called to look back on our path; and what a spectacle we behold! The dead carried out of the church; and the road around Jerusalem all alive with those who are carrying their sick to be cured. For it is now time to show the church of Christ can afford to tell the truth, that hypocrites may enter there; but she cannot afford to keep them; though, when they are cast out, the power and grace of our Lord shall gather others from the world.

LECTURE VI.

IMPRISONMENT AND DELIVERANCE OF THE APOSTLES.

ACTS v. 17 to the end.

WHEN our Lord said to the chosen twelve, "Ye are they that have continued with me in my temptations, and I appoint to you a kingdom," what visions of glory and dominion may have risen to their view! The two sons of Zebedee "knew not what they asked;" and when Christ promised them thrones, how little they thought of prisons, and scourges, and death! We are accustomed to view them in glory; but, to-day, we must see them in gaol.

When infidels read of houses and estates sold, and the money laid at the apostles' feet; and when it is said that the sick were laid on beds in the streets, to receive Peter's healing touch, and even to find his mere shadow passing over them, that it might cure their diseases, the sceptics exclaim, "A gainful trade was this for the fishermen of Galilee, who were almost worshipped as gods." But why not look, ye scorers, at the other side; the persecution, and stripes, and imprisonment, and martyrdom of the apostles for Christ's sake?

From that minor specimen of suffering which we have already noticed, the imprisonment of Peter and John, we have now to turn and view the whole apostolic college immured in gaol. Here are three conflicts: those of force, of argument, and of policy.

I. THE CONFLICT OF FORCE. Ver. 17—21.

1. *On the side of the persecutors: read verses 17, 18.* That the high priest and his friends were of the sect of the Sadducees, is mentioned to account for their *envy*, as the margin properly expresses the original; and for their violence, as this was the most reckless party among the Jews. When the streets of Jerusalem were like the wards of an hospital, filled with the sick waiting for cure; and when the roads leading to the capital exhibited proofs that the rural parts were filled with the fame of the apostles of Christ; we cannot wonder at the fierce jealousy of the more sceptical men in power. During our Lord's abode on earth, the Pharisees, with their superstition and self-righteousness, were the bitterest foes to Him who was called "the friend of publicans and sinners;" but when he had risen from the dead, the Sadducees, who had been more indifferent, became fierce opponents of the apostles' testimony to the resurrection, while the Pharisees were somewhat softened by the triumphs of a doctrine which was their own. As the Jewish state hastened to destruction, the worst party seized the reins of power, and these desperate priests would suffer none to stand in their way. They seem to have said, "Why have we imprisoned two of these men, and afterwards left them all at liberty to pursue their scheme? Imprison them all, and crush the new sect at a stroke." "They laid their hands on the whole twelve, and put them in the public prison," where thieves and murderers were confined. The golden candlestick, with its twelve lamps, fit to burn and shine in the temple, and make it the light of the world, is thrown into a dungeon! Is this the way men treat the lights which heaven kindles upon earth? Yes; if you ask, "Where are the twelve constellations?" you are told, they are under eclipse; men in their enmity have deprived themselves of heaven's brightest beams. The prisons of this world have contained the finest minds, the most benevolent hearts, and the most devotional spirits, that ever sojourned in flesh. But twelve such men as the apostles (their Lord was with them always, even to the end of the world) formed a paradise in a prison, and we exclaim, "To have listened to their discourse, and joined in their prayers and praises, we would gladly have shared their doom!"

2. *On the side of the persecuted: read verses 19—21.* Though we have, with Solomon, seen that sore evil under the sun,

“power on the side of the oppressors;” we must not add, “the oppressed had no comforter.” For if two apostles were left in prison till the enemy chose to bring them out in the ordinary course of events, no angel being sent down, no miracle being wrought in their behalf; now that the whole company of the chosen witnesses is silenced, our Lord taught his enemies, that if they could display power, so could he; and if they could say, “Now where are your apostles?” he could say, “Now where are your gaols?” For an angel of the Lord, by night, opened the doors of the prison, and brought them out. How simply, how briefly, is this told; as if by one so accustomed to such things that they ceased to be wonders! But if the apostles were confined in separate cells, there must have been twelve of these angel-visits and delightful surprises on finding each cell opened by such a warder! Looking up, to see who was opening the door, and expecting, perhaps, to be brought forth by some grim messenger of death, or to be all slaughtered in gaol, each apostle beholds an angel’s face! And now they are brought together to see each other’s face again; but, as was said of the three Hebrews whom Nebuchadnezzar cast into the fiery furnace, “Lo, there is a fourth, and his form is like the Son of God;” so now behold a thirteenth, of heavenly form!

As he brought them out, see them all standing on the outside of the prison, to hear their orders from the Lord of angels and men; “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life:” not, “Go, fly for your lives; hide yourselves, that no man may know where to find you; but stand and speak, where every one may hear you, all the words of this life,” which the Syriac renders “all these words of life.” But another interpretation retains the peculiar form of the original, by keeping in view the conflict between the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, and the apostles who maintained that Christ was risen from the dead, and had become the first-fruits of them that slept. “Go, then,” says the heavenly messenger, “and speak all the words of this resurrection-life. Go, tell them that Jesus is alive again, and is the life of men. Of this life, speak; that they who wish to forget it, may be forced to remember; and they who wish to learn the way to life, may hear and live for ever.”

The ten had persevered in their testimony, when two of their

colleagues had been imprisoned for it, though no angel appeared to rescue the two; but now they are still more fortified by a divine interposition, when all, though imprisoned, were delivered, in answer to the prayers of the bereaved church. For if, in a more advanced stage, "prayer was made without ceasing by the church for Peter" alone in prison, how earnest must have been the intercessions of the infant society on behalf of the whole twelve, whom they might call "the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof." As the last persecution will be followed by the resurrection and triumph of the witnesses, so was this first general attack on the apostles. Earth said, "Bury them all alive, that none of them may speak;" but Heaven said, "Bring them all out of the tomb, that they may go stand in the temple, and speak all the words of this life, that shall know no death."

Thus ended the conflict of force, when it was said, "The devil shall cast some of you into prison," and "the angel of the Lord brought them out." Turn we now to—

II. THE CONFLICT OF ARGUMENT. Ver. 21—32.

When they heard their orders, the twelve entered, ere it was day, into the temple, and taught; which seems to intimate that the apostles were not left all night in the prison, but were brought out so soon after being locked up, that they went to their own homes; whence, returning, they re-assembled at the earliest hour that could afford an audience, before it was light, when the morning sacrifice drew the people out, to accompany it with their prayers. They who knew that the apostles had been imprisoned must have gazed with astonishment, and listened to the testimony they were so eager to bear. Such is the course which we have learned from the apostles to pursue; to preach while we have liberty; when imprisoned, patiently to suffer; and when liberated, to teach again immediately. This conduct produced the conflict between

1. *The Sanhedrim.* Ver. 21. For the high priest, and those that were with him, convoked the great council and all the presbytery, or eldership, of the children of Israel; for our translators, by the word "senate," intended to convey the idea of seniority. The Sanhedrim was, however, what would be called the Senate; and this additional mention of the elders intimates that, beside those who were members of the Sanhedrim, there were convoked all

whose standing and experience gave them weight. That they sent to the prison to have the apostles brought, must remind us who know where the apostles now were, of the inspired words, "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel together against the Lord and his Christ; but he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision." See the blank looks of the officers, when they open the prison, and find no apostles there! Hear them, when returned, tell their strange tale to the council: "The prison, indeed, we found shut up in all security, and the guards standing before the doors; but, when we had opened it, we found nobody within." The priest, not the high priest, as our version says, is mentioned here, as some *one* who, along with the captain of the temple guard, felt for his power, being entrusted with the care of the temple. As if the sword had dropped from its sheath, and gaols and temples had become alike open to these apostles, "none of the men of might could find their hands." Who can glance from the priests to the apostles, without exclaiming, "How are the mighty fallen! How are the lowly exalted!"

At length, the rulers are—relieved, shall I say? or still more embarrassed, by some one coming and saying, "Behold, the men whom you put in the gaol are in the temple, standing and teaching the people." The messenger may have hated the apostles and their teaching, and therefore hoped to gratify the authorities, by giving them information; but they who were glad to know what had become of the prisoners, must have been mortified to find that, so far were the twelve from fear or flight, that they were in the most public place pursuing the work for which they had been imprisoned. To escape from the conflict was impossible; the priests were obliged to send the captain with his officers, who brought the apostles, without violence, not for their own sakes, but on account of the people, with whom they were now popular, and who would not scruple to stone the officers, on account of the miraculous cures lately wrought. There was no need of force to compel the apostles, who welcomed every opportunity of bearing testimony to their Lord. What power of imagination or expression could do justice to the scene, when the officers return, followed by the twelve, who form a procession into the hall, the crowd giving way on every side, exclaiming, "These are the men whom prisons cannot hold, nor power

terrify! Are they real men of flesh and blood, or ethereal spirits?" It must have been with some effort, even to the bold bad man, the high priest, that he asked them, "Did we not strictly charge you not to teach in this name?" Thus they speak of the charge given to Peter and John, when let out of prison, as having been intended for all the apostles. But mark how they mention the name, become so celebrated, that it is not necessary to say what name they mean. The grand question, the resurrection of Christ and the proof of his Messiahship, they now avoid. The whole trial turns upon the conduct of the apostles towards those in authority. "You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine," which we commanded you not to utter. If this was mortifying to the foe, to be bearded in the capital, the very seat of authority, how consoling was it to the chosen witnesses, whom Christ charged to begin at Jerusalem, and who are now proved, by the confession of the enemies, (and who should know better than they?) to have made a good beginning! "And you are wishing to bring this man's blood upon us." Ah, how changed their tone! Once they cried, "His blood be on us and our children." The confession is now extorted that the blood of this man was innocent blood, for they complain of having it charged upon them. Who, then, shed it? "The Romans," they would say, as did Orobio, the Jew, in his conflict with Limborch, at Amsterdam. Learn, ye who suffer yourselves to be made tools to work wickedness for other men, that they will throw the whole blame upon you at last. But, alas! upon that generation of the Jews came all the righteous blood shed, from that of Abel, to the blood of Christ. But observe how the high priest and his party are defending *themselves*, as if the apostles were the accusers, and the rulers were tried for shedding the blood of Jesus. Sooner or later, persecutors will change places with the persecuted; for "when He maketh inquisition for blood," God will show that he "has ordained his arrows against the persecutors." He appointed such institutions as taught the Jews to shudder at the shedding of innocent blood. Deut. xxi. 2. Hear now

2. *The apostles*, ver. 29—32. When it is said that "Peter and the apostles" thus spake, we learn that only what we have here; *Peter* said, "though other apostles also bore their testimony." It is necessary to obey God, rather than men. This is

an everlasting rule. The God whom the enemies acknowledged "the God of our fathers," said Peter, "raised up Jesus, whom ye despatched, by hanging on a tree." Here is a reference to the Mosaic statute : "If a man commit a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, for he that is hanged is accursed of God." "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us ;" as it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." But as Christ was not hung, literally, on a *tree*, it should be known that the same word in Hebrew, as also in English and German, signifies, not only tree, but wood, timber, beam, post, gibbet. They who cried out, "Ye would bring this man's blood on us," are told, "You handled him, and hanged him on a tree. Your hands are defiled with blood." Yes, though the Roman soldiers actually *handled* him, the apostle uses this very expression, and affirms that the Jews did it, as if he intended the more emphatically to meet their charge : "You would bring this man's blood upon us." For who employed the Romans ? Who forced Pilate to the deed ? Did he not say, "I find no fault in this man" ? Was it not, when you said, "If thou let this man go thou art not Cæsar's friend ;" and when a tumult was made by you, that he called for water and washed his hands, and said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person" ? And did not you reply, "His blood be on us and our children" ? In vain, then, you attempt to throw off the blame, and leave the blood on others.

This person, whom you attempted to make infamous, God has exalted, with his right hand, which has gotten the victory ; a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins. Thus, the fact is accounted for, that Jerusalem is full of his disciples ; for he gives a heart to repent. The sword is anointed with balm ; for how must this charge of guilt, cutting them to the heart, need to be followed by words of mercy ! To be told that Christ was a Sovereign, (for so might the word be rendered), was alarming to those who had deserved his wrath ; but they are assured he is a Saviour indeed ; for he gives a change of mind, and then forgives the sins of which we are brought to repent. If the apostles would bring Christ's blood on the murderers ; it was not for vengeance, but forgiveness. By office bound to speak ; "We are witnesses of these things," say they, "and can we be rebellious against heaven's Prince, and faithless to a Saviour to whom

we owe both our repentance and our forgiveness? *He* has called us to bear witness, and *you* have commanded us not to speak in his name. We decide, that God should be obeyed rather than man." Did we not tell you so, when you charged us not to speak in this name? "The Holy Ghost, also," is declared to be a witness, as Christ had said to his disciples, John xv. 27: "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, who proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me, and ye also shall bear witness; because ye have been with me from the beginning." This union of the Spirit with the apostolic word demands special regard. We must not suppose that it refers to the miraculous gifts and operations of the Spirit, for these were manifest to all men; but this is a testimony "of the Spirit which God has given to them that obey him." The same Spirit that bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, bears witness to Christ that he is the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world. He shows such glory in Christ as convinces us that he is true and Divine; gives such peace and joy in believing on him, as nothing but God's truth could inspire; kindles such love of holiness, his image, as proves that the religion is from a holy God, and inspires such hope of glory as proclaims Christ to be the Conqueror of death.

"As this Spirit, who testifies in the heart that obeys Christ, cannot be silenced; what avails the attempt to gag the human witness? Could you strike dumb those who speak to the ear; there is still one speaking to the heart all that truth which you seek to quench." Thus ends the conflict of argument.

III. THE CONFLICT OF POLICY CLOSES THE SCENE. Here the combatants are the violent, and the moderate party.

1. *The violent party.* Ver. 33. These, wounded by Peter's discourse, tacitly confess their inability to reply, and therefore advise to kill all the apostles. "Prisons will not hold them; try if swords will slay them." You exclaim, "Are these the men that were so sensitive to the charge of shedding blood? Did they pretend to shift off from themselves, to the Romans, the guilt of Christ's blood; and are they now, instead of one, plotting to kill twelve? How little could they have cared for the credit of consistency or sincerity! But what has become of truth or

argument? To kill men, is not to answer them! What are we think of the rejection of Jesus by such men? They who answered the apostles' reasons by murderous counsels, could throw no disgrace, or even suspicion, on him whom they refused to receive as Messiah. The apostles, seeing the design, perhaps, were committing themselves to Him that holds the keys of death, when, from amidst the conclave of foes, arises deliverance.

2. *The moderate party.* Ver. 34 to the end. The recklessness of the Sadducees alarmed a Pharisee, who had sufficient weight to turn the scale in favour of a better policy. This was Gamaliel, who is mentioned in the Mishneh, as that one man at whose death all virtue ceased from among the Jews. As "a doctor of the law, he had, with the people, a reputation," which seems due to the superior sense that shines in his decisions; and as a Pharisee, he opposed the desperate counsels of the Sadducees; though he is said to have become, at last, a deadly foe to Christians. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who was brought up at his feet, may have brought on him that odium as a favourer of Christianity, which, unable to bear, he sought to escape by rushing into the ranks of the more desperate foes. Alas, for Gamaliel!

That he commanded the apostles to go out of the court, has been accounted for by calling him the President; but the high priest held that place, though the reputation of Gamaliel obtained for him a private hearing. "Men of Israel," he said, "take heed to yourselves;" for mischief recoils on the head of the perpetrators; "what are you going to do to these men"? He then reminds them of "one Theudas, who called himself something great, and attached to him about four hundred men, that perished with him; the whole affair coming to nothing. After this man, rose Judas, the Galilean, in the days of the census, or registration. He also perished, and all that were persuaded by him dispersed." Some discrepancy between these narratives, and those which Josephus gives of the same persons, has brought on him the charge of falsifying history in opposition to Christianity, to which crime, if true, he has furnished the counterpart, by declaring that innumerable impostors arose; and Theudas as well as Judas, was a common name. As for Luke, he records what Gamaliel said, whether true or false; though there is no reason to doubt its truth, which he knew better than Josephus, who lived many years after. Michaelis detects the mistakes of Josephus, and

demonstrates the greater accuracy of what is here recorded ; though Lardner shows the high probability of a reference by two writers to two different persons of the same name.

From these instances of abortive attempts to form parties, Gamaliel derives the inference : “ And now, for the present, I say to you, Withdraw from these men, and let them alone.” He saw that they had already embarrassed themselves by meddling with the apostles, and wished to escape from the perplexity. But his general maxim is not correctly rendered ; for he says, “ If this counsel,” referring to the supposed scheme, or aim, of the Christians, “ or this work,” alluding to their labours in forming the church, “ be of men, it will be destroyed,” as Theudas and Judas were ; “ but since it is of God, you are not able to destroy it.” The hypothetical form of the first part of the sentence, “ If it be of men,” is exchanged, in the last part, for the positive, “ Since it is of God ;” * which confirms the opinion that Gamaliel was a Christian, by conviction of the theoretical truth, though unacquainted with the spiritual nature and moral beauty of our religion. His judgment was compelled to submit to evidence, but his heart was not won by the holiness of the Gospel. The Jews ascribe to him an execration on the Christians, introduced into a rabbinical prayer ; and everything tends to prove that he remained till death in the enemy’s camp. His case reminds us of the celebrated Erasmus, the Coryphæus of the literati, who commenced the attack on the ignorance and superstition of the monks, and was the forerunner of the Reformation. But he had not the soul of a confessor. Mild, gentle, elegant, loving the praise of men, and flattered by scholars, princes, popes, he began to stand aloof from the reformers, and then attacked them ; till, trusted by neither party, both joined the cry, “ Alas ! poor Erasmus !” Gamaliel, the doctor of the law, could not resign the Sanhedrim for the church ; nor sacrifice his reputation by taking up the cross to follow Christ.

But the first part of Gamaliel’s counsel, interrupted by a parenthesis, should be joined to the last : “ Let them alone, lest, perhaps, ye be found God’s antagonists.” The Greeks had classical stories of giants warring with their gods ; and the Jews are here warned of placing themselves in the desperate position of men fighting with God. Alas ! how many madly venture on this

* Ἐὰν ᾗ . . . εἰ ἐστίν.

unequal battle, in spite of his warning: "Woe to him that striveth with his Maker; let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth." Who would draw a sword against a flash of lightning, which may melt his weapon, and make it the instrument of his own death?

They were persuaded by him, though very imperfectly; for, having called the apostles in again, they scourged them, which is scarcely understood, or even noticed, when we read the words, "beaten them." But the Greek expresses scourging, so as to strip off the skin. The Jews were accustomed to do this, even in the synagogues; stripping the person to the waist, and tying him up, by his hands, to a pillar, to receive thirty-nine stripes. This was a strange way of letting them alone; but Gamaliel probably consented to it for the same reason that Pilate, in the same breath, pronounced Jesus innocent, and ordered him to be scourged; in hope of satiating the malice of the enemies by the minor punishment, that they might be contented to stop there. Bad policy, to do a little injustice in order to avoid a greater.

Charging the apostles not to speak in the name of Jesus, the authorities dismissed them, making a vain attempt to save appearances, by repeating commands which they had been told could not be obeyed. But who can survey this whole process without exclaiming, "Great is the truth, and will prevail"? How impotent is the power of the sword against that of the word! Who would not rather have been the apostles at the bar, than the priests on the bench? It is better to be scourged on the back than in the conscience.

For though the witnesses for Christ were shamefully treated, stripped, flogged, and sent away bleeding, they departed from the presence of such a council, not hiding their faces, not bewailing their hard lot, not uttering execrations, but rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name. This has been called *ὀξύμωρον*, a figure of speech which, like bitter sweet, conceals under the form of folly the keenest sense. They counted themselves honoured with disgrace; glorying in the shame put upon them, "for the name," as Griesbach gives the text. Do not ask, "What name?" for that is not a Christian's question. There is no other name under heaven of which we can think, but that of Jesus. To see the whole twelve apostles whipped as the vilest criminals may excite our surprise and

indignation. But they rejoiced that they were counted worthy of such honour. When stripped, they were clothed with glory ; when their skin was torn, they wore scars of honour ; and they knew how to say, " I thank, thee, Lord, that thou hast so conformed me to thyself." No joy, on this side heaven, is equal to that which a disciple tastes, when, suffering for Christ, he receives a pledge, that, if called to it, he should be enabled to die for the name of the Lord Jesus.

Far from obeying the command, "not to speak in the name of Jesus," they proved their determination to obey God rather than man ; so that, " daily in the temple,"—that is, the court, the place of greatest resort,—and in private houses, they incessantly taught and proclaimed glad tidings, included in Jesus the Messiah, Son of God, and Saviour of men. The rulers had been too much embarrassed with this trial of force, argument, and policy, again to meddle with the apostles ; and were glad, for a long time, to hearken to the counsel, " Refrain from those men, and let them alone."

We rejoice over the termination of this affair, which must have been most alarming to the Church. Too much in its infancy to be able to afford to lose all the apostles, it owed too much to them to see them cast into gaol, without tenderest sympathy and keenest anguish of heart. Their Lord, who saw their sorrows and the enemy's exultation, proved to them the truth of the ancient maxim, " Man's extremity is God's opportunity." The apostles are restored to the church with new honours ; having suffered for Christ imprisonment and stripes, and having been proclaimed, by *heaven*, men not to be injured with impunity ; by *earth*, persons so mysterious, that it is not safe to inquire how they came out of prison. For mark the significant silence which the enemy maintained on what might naturally have been the first theme of investigation, " Who let you out?" On another occasion, the severest scrutiny was followed by the death of the keepers, though innocent ; but now the government ventures not to speak a word on the subject ; and the apostles, who never parade the miracles wrought for them, or by them, confine themselves to the questions on which they are examined. To the church they return, to tell the wonders which their Lord had wrought, and to teach them how he turns " the counsels of the wicked into foolishness." Whence deliverance may arise we know not,

perhaps from among the enemies themselves ; but of this we may be sure, we shall look back and say, " What hath God wrought ! "

The one question which the enemy put to the apostles, elicited the grave lesson, which we should here learn, that we are bound to obey God rather than men. But why can we not obey both, at the same time ? Why place those two in opposition ? Has not God said, " Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. Be subject to every ordinance of man for the soul's sake " ? If these commands to obey governors were unlimited, there never could be any conflicting authority to justify the apostle's decision, that we ought to " obey God rather than men. " There must, then, be some limitation of human authority, by that of God ; and it is necessary for us to know the province of each, and their exact boundary line, that we may not sin against the one or the other. At the very time that the apostle Paul commanded the Roman church to be subject, not merely for wrath but " for conscience sake, " he was teaching them that religion which was contrary to the laws of the Roman empire, throughout which he was himself propagating that religion. It is clear, therefore, that he did not include religion within the province of the civil governor, who is appointed " for the punishment of evil-doers and the praise of them that do well. " For this, he bears the sword of vengeance against those who break the peace and destroy the security of society. But God has kept the government of the church and the affairs of religion in his own hands ; the only hands fit to touch the delicate and sacred subject of rule over conscience, where the interests, not of time, but of eternity, are involved.

If ever a government had a right to rule in religion, it was that of the Jews, which the apostles here refuse to obey, in conscientious deference to the paramount authority of God. Our religion rose and prevailed in opposition to all the governments and all the established religions of the world. For as God has committed to civil rulers nothing but the peace and safety of society, and reserved to himself the interests of the soul and all dictation in the affairs of religion ; if governors intrude into his province, we are bound, by our allegiance to him, to disobey them ; lest we should make them, not merely equal, but superior to God. If it be said, this doctrine of conflicting authority

must destroy the peace of society ; we answer, the apostle's declaration, " we ought to obey God rather than men," is a defence against the charge of disobedience. The peace of society is not endangered ; for we are forbidden to take the sword in the cause of religion, which is ruined, not promoted, by violence ; and this doctrine of patient endurance, in opposition to physical resistance and revenge, is a pledge of the sincerity of those who suffer from men, for their obedience to God. Never will the peace of society and the interests of religion be secured, till men learn thus to " render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's."

If I have gone over the same ground as in a former Lecture, be it remembered, that the apostles have a second time taught the same grand truth, which we must repeat, till the world shall have learned

" That consciences and souls were made
For Christ the Lord alone."

We have seen our Lord preparing his church for an hour that was to be expected, when the apostles, like himself, should be taken from us. They are now gone,—for ever, shall we say ? However, the church remains ; for it is built on a rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. For its extension our Lord was now preparing ; as when he said to Israel, " Like an eagle stirring up her nest, taking her young, bearing them on her wings, the Lord dealt with you ;" so that the imprisonment of the apostles was a signal for their dispersion, that " their words might go forth to the end of the world."

Again we review our path, and find the whole college of apostles warned by their imprisonment that they must follow their Lord to prison and to death ; though their liberation teaches us that heaven will take care of them till they have finished their testimony.

LECTURE VII.

THE INSTITUTION OF DEACONS.

ACTS vi. 1—7.

IN every society, some must be selected to conduct its affairs; for, even where the legislation is with the many, the execution must be committed to a few. In ordinary communities, the general body first exists, and afterwards appoints its own officers; but in the Christian church, Christ himself, the Head, and Sovereign Lord, was the Creator, who called a people to himself, to show forth his praise; and employed for this purpose persons of his own choice, to deliver his orders for the regulation of every age. The twelve apostles, therefore, being “the ministers of the word,” presided over the first disciples; and other pastors were not needed, till that church, which was “the mother of us all,” brought forth many daughters, over whom were placed “pastors and teachers.” In the church of Jerusalem, the first appointment of officers was not that of ministers of the word, but deacons, for the care of the poor, which soon required the wisest minds and most faithful hearts. As the Acts of the Apostles record the laws of Christ for the regulation of his church, this first appointment of officers demands our careful study.

I. THE OCCASION IS RECORDED. Ver. 1.

“In those days, the disciples multiplying,” as we have lately

seen, "there arose a murmuring;" which may teach us, that if we mourn the paucity of believers, when the ways of Zion are deserted, because "no man goeth to her solemn feasts;" we may have to lament, that increasing numbers also bring their sorrows. The murmurs arose among the Grecians, or Hellenists, as scholars call them, adopting, rather than translating, the original word. Eight different opinions have been formed of its meaning, with which I will not trouble you; for, of those which claim attention, there are but two. The first supposes the Hellenists to have been Jews, by descent and religion, but born where Greek became their native tongue, and unable to speak Hebrew. The other view, which I entertain, is, that these Hellenists were by birth heathens, but by conversion complete Jews. The apostle divides the world between Jews and Greeks; so that the latter stand for all the heathens, in consequence of the wide spread of the Greek tongue by Alexander's conquests. I cannot, therefore, think that Jews by descent were called by their friends, Hellenists, which would sound as near to Greeks as the word heathenish to heathens; while I find that, wherever the apostles went, through all Asia and Europe, the descendants of Abraham, in those lands, are called by no other name than that of Jews. But the Hellenists mentioned *here*, had, after submitting to the law of Moses, embraced the faith of Christ, and joined his church. If ever descendants of Abraham are called Hellenists, I suppose it was a misapplication, by way of reproach, for their ignorance of the proper language of the Jews, and their conformity to Grecian manners. The Syriac calls them Ionians, meaning Greeks. The superior evidence of the Jewish religion had won multitudes of the more thoughtful Gentiles; and these, called the pious, or persons fearing God, we often find embracing the Gospel, when the Jews rejected it; so that the Redeemer might again say, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel; for they shall come from the east and the west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom; and the children of the kingdom shall be cast out."

The murmuring was against the Hebrews, or Jewish natives of Palestine, who called their dialect Hebrew, though it had passed into Syriac. Difference of speech creates other differences; and those who spoke the language of the country had many advantages over such as employed foreign tongues; so

that the widows of the Greek disciples were overlooked, unintentionally, no doubt, in the daily administration of relief from the charity of the church. Widows are so frequently mentioned, and such regulations were made for their support, that we are reminded how terribly the wars of those times desolated the earth, cutting off the men in battle, and leaving sometimes several widows, who had been the wives of one man. But the God who threatened, that, for sin, "the widows should be multiplied," said also, "Let your widows trust in me," and drew many of them to the knowledge of Christ. To these, the special objects of Divine care, there was every day a portion distributed from those sums which were laid at the feet of the apostles, whose position was not what would be envied by the sceptic, who, sneering at their command of money, would be unwilling to take their charge of the poor widows.

This daily administration Luke calls a deaconship; for that term was in common use among the Greeks, before the institution of the office mentioned here, the want of which was at first supplied by the apostles themselves, to whose care the offerings of the rich were consigned. But when the numbers of the widows were so great, that a large part of the day was consumed in distributing to their necessities, the twelve, called away to the ministry of the word, could not attend to every case; and the widows of the foreigners, being overlooked, were destitute. Murmurs, therefore, arose, where all had been of one heart and one soul. In heaven only can we hope for the continuance of bright days without a cloud, and harmony without a jarring note. The murmurs, being not without cause, were not left without a remedy, but led to that which we have now to study.

II. THE INSTITUTION. Ver. 2—6.

He who has taken occasion from the entrance of sin, with its attendant miseries, to bring forth the grandest display of sanctity and benevolence, in that redemption which will be the admiration of all worlds through eternity, often overrules the evils that arise in the church, to call into existence blessings which he had in reserve for some occasion that would, by their necessity, demonstrate their worth. Here the murmuring of disciples called forth,

3. *That conduct of the apostles which demands our esteem:* ver. 2—4. Instead of drowning and silencing complaints, by the haughty tone of authority towards the Greeks, the twelve (apostles), which must include Matthias, whom some exclude, called the multitude of the disciples together. Where? Surely not in Solomon's porch of the temple, where we find them all bearing their testimony to the world, but which seems not suitable for the business of the church. Nothing embarrasses us more, in this part of the history, than the silence observed concerning a place of worship, which is with us so important an affair; but is passed by as unworthy of notice in Scripture, putting to shame the notion of holy places. That the Christians did not build, at this season of persecution, an edifice capable of containing thousands, we may be morally sure; and yet the whole multitude could be called together, to deliberate and act. We seem shut up to the conclusion, that, among the rich, who could sell houses and estates, there was at least some one who reserved a house large enough to contain the thousands that assembled there. The form of their dwellings, and the climate of Judæa, would make this more practicable than among us. But in whatever way we determine this difficult question, we have here an answer to the objection raised against congregational principles; as if it were impossible that the numerous mother-church at Jerusalem should ever have met as one congregation. Here, however, we find the whole multitude called together, to deliberate and choose officers.

The apostles said to them, "It is not agreeable for us to leave the word of God, to serve tables," as deacons, or waiters on the tables where the money is laid out for the widows. The original word might be translated, to deaconise; and this is the second time, you will observe, that allusion is here made to the office of deacon, which, among the Greeks, signified waiter.

The apostles were eye-witnesses and *ministers of the word*, which is the most important affair in the Christian church,—a society composed of men who are born again of the word of truth, and "sanctified and cleansed by the washing of water, by the word." The ministry of the word, therefore, is an arduous affair even for an apostle, and much more for us, who have "to study to show ourselves approved of God, rightly dividing the word of truth, that we may be apt to teach, able by sound

doctrine to instruct the faithful, and convince gainsayers." If it was disagreeable to the apostles, to be called off from this primary business, to wait at money-tables; it should be so to us, who are compelled to give ourselves wholly to the ministry of the word. For this reason, the Lord has ordained that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel; for "no man who warreth in the Christian ministry should entangle himself in the affairs of this life; that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier."

"Look ye out, therefore, brethren, from among yourselves, men of good reputation, seven, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we will set over this necessary business." This is the second time that we have met with an election to office, by the whole body of the faithful. If, in the former instance, it may be said, the hundred-and-twenty who chose the two proposed for the apostolate, were a select body; here we have the whole multitude of Christians, when amounting to thousands, called to choose. Not, however, that this is open to the objection raised against popular elections; for it is only such "a church as is a congregation of faithful men," that should be entrusted with the choice of its own officers. Private patronage may be as good as election by a promiscuous crowd, except that they who must pay should choose. Our Lord says, "No man sews a piece of new cloth on an old garment." If we would have one thing scriptural, we must endeavour to have all. The church must itself be composed of its true elements, real believers, before it can derive the benefit of scriptural order.

But, while the apostles referred the election to the whole multitude of the brethren, this was not leaving them to do as they pleased, but as they ought; the qualifications of the persons being prescribed. Chosen from *among themselves*, they were to be such as had a good report, the testimony of the brethren in their favour; they were to be full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom, and to be seven in number. In the purest community, all are not alike excellent; but as the church exists for the honour of Christ, none should bear office who have not a good reputation. This is not to be obtained but by good conduct, of which a call to office is the honourable reward. Favouritism, or electioneering arts, or the worship of money, should never prevail over the general testimony to individual excellence. In

the case before us, complaints of neglect made it specially necessary that the administration of the ecclesiastical fund should be entrusted to men whom all would approve and trust. Their piety, not miraculous gifts, which a Judas might possess, was expressed by the phrase, "filled with the Holy Spirit;" for the apostle exhorts us all to be filled with the "Spirit which God gives to them that believe." That "wisdom" was required we easily see; for indiscriminate charity is mere prodigality; and the apostle said, "If any will not work, neither shall he eat;" since that which is given to him that ought not, is taken from them who ought to receive. The wisely liberal relief of the poor will draw forth the liberality of the rich. As to the number seven; there is no mystery in it; the business required so many, and being an odd number, there was no danger of the votes being equal. But who would say, that, because seven were required in a church of some thousands, there should be as many for a few hundreds?

Mark the apostles' words: "*We* will set them over this business." A printed edition of the Scriptures, which has "*Ye* may appoint them," has been called the Independent Bible. But Independents have no such principle; for this is a mere error of the press, which may easily arise by substituting the *y* for the *w*. Much importance has been given to this question of appointment after election, to which I attach little; for, we are to be guided by the Scriptures, not as children, but as those to whom the apostle says, "I speak as to wise men; judge what I say." The twelve, who had hitherto administered the fund for the poor, said, "Choose ye out men, and we will set *them* instead of ourselves, over this business;" but nothing can from thence be inferred concerning ministers who never had that affair in their hands. If a punctilious attention is to be paid to this as a precedent, it would, indeed, prove that when the election of the persons is made, the ministers appoint to the office; which may certainly be allowed.

The concluding sentence,—"*We* will give ourselves to prayer and to the deaconship of the word," as the original speaks, shows how little importance the Scriptures attach to technical terms, which have deceived and infatuated mankind. The apostles seem to say, "If the deacons wait at tables, we will wait on the word; for we are all, in several ways, servants to

wait on one Lord." We will persevere in prayer ; and if they who had a ministry so extraordinary, sealed by miraculous powers, which roused the attention of a slumbering world, were called to intense devotions ; how much more are we, who are so far their inferiors !

There can be no hope of success to the ministry of those who are not men of prayer. They who declare, also, that they will persist in the ministry of the word, when relieved of a pecuniary administration, teach all others that the leisure afforded them by the duty laid upon the church to support the ministry, should be faithfully consecrated to a service, which is

"Enough to fill an angel's heart,
And filled a Saviour's hands."

When *really* supported by the church, it is worse than dishonesty, it is impious sacrilege, for a minister to desecrate the time which belongs to Christ, by employing it unnecessarily in the affairs of the world.

The ministry of the word demands the whole of any man, let his talents and piety be what they may. The churches, therefore, are bound to enable pastors to say, "We will give ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word ;" and they are bound to do it.

2. *The conduct of this church* is now exhibited for our imitation. "The discourse pleased the whole multitude ;" for real disciples, in a prosperous state of religion, may be safely trusted to approve that counsel which a wise and faithful ministry will give. When the elect are electors they will not choose reprobrates ; and this church chose, first, as if all eyes were immediately directed to him, Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, who became celebrated as the protomartyr ; Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch, who has been foolishly taken for the author of the Nicolaitan sect. As their names are Greek, it is supposed the church chose Greeks, to avoid all further suspicions of partiality to the Hebrews, in full confidence that none would be shown to Greeks. Lovely example of the charity that thinketh no evil ! The proselyte of Antioch, mentioned last, has led some to conclude that the *others* were Jews by descent, but born where Greek became their native tongue, and not proselytes from

heathenism to the Jews' religion. But, as a proselyte of *Antioch*, Nicholas is distinguished on account of the city, which will come again under our notice.

Such were the seven "whom they set before the apostles, and these, having prayed, laid their hands on them;" an ancient custom in the Jewish nation, and a natural expression of approbation and special prayer for the person so marked out. A wonderful charm has been ascribed to the laying on of hands, as if it were a magical touch, which conveyed holy orders from apostles to bishops, from bishops to priests and deacons, to the end of the world. Unfortunately for these fanatical pretensions, the apostles laid hands first on deacons, and are never said to lay hands on bishops at all. Nor is it said that any hands were laid on Matthias, an apostle; and when Paul was called to be an apostle, the Lord, who appeared to him, did not lay his hands on him, and Ananias, who did, was no apostle, nor is it said that he was a minister. Other hands than those of apostles were laid on Paul and Barnabas, long after they had been in the ministry, to express the solicitude of the church for their success in a new mission. "The laying on of the apostles' hands" was the usual sign of their imparting miraculous gifts; which were, however, conferred on the first Gentile converts, without any such sign. If Paul says to Timothy, "Stir up the gift of God that is in thee, by the putting on of my hands;" he says, also, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." This, which is a significant sign of special prayer for one who is commended to the Lord for his blessing, on any special work, may be given, or withheld, without any important effect. "All things are sanctified by the word of God and prayer," and not by mystic actions; which are, however important in a deceptive system, utterly abhorrent from the religion of Jesus."

III. THE CONSEQUENCE IS RECORDED. Ver. 7.

"The word of God increased," which may seem a singular expression, but it was familiar to the Greeks; as Xenophon says, "the name of Cyrus grew greatly," after a certain battle. The diffusion of the knowledge of the word, and the increase of its influence on the public mind, with its triumphs over the hearts of many, were its increase; as Paul prayed that "the word of the

Lord might have free course and be glorified." The extinction of murmurs, and the appointment, in a way so fair and satisfactory, of officers for the distribution of the church's charity, were honourable to the apostles and their doctrine; for had they been worldly deceivers, they never would have parted with the administration of such a fund. Now, "heavenly peace, with balmy wing, shades and bedews the whole;" the murmurs of the church are exchanged for prayers, and they, whose strife would have consumed each other, brought down blessings on the world around. The apostles, left at liberty to persevere in giving themselves wholly to prayer and the ministry of the word, were so blessed, that "the number of the disciples in Jerusalem was multiplied greatly." Lasting memorial of the truth of that Gospel which lifted its standard in the fortress of the enemies; and which, if it could be contradicted at all, could most effectually at Jerusalem! Perpetual memorial of God's faithfulness to Abraham and to David; for now was the fountain of mercy opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem! But as, in that city, Jews were continually coming and going, departures may have diminished that church which conversions had increased.

"A great crowd, from among the priests, obeyed the faith." Those of the inferior order were called by the more learned rabbis, priests of the people and of the earth; and these furnished the converts, while it was still said, "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed?" The chief priests were too proud to bow to the cross; and the inferior class were often so ignorant and profane, that Hosea compares them to "troops of robbers." But there were some honourable exceptions, and these, seeing the promise of a Saviour, in the sacrifices which they offered, embraced him when he came. Of this class was the father of John the Baptist, who praised God, not that he had raised up a son in the house of Aaron, but a "horn of salvation in the house of his servant David." But while we must honourably distinguish the priests of God's appointment, from the hybrid things, half-Jewish, half-heathen, called priests among Christians, who ought to be all priests, owning one Christ, as our high priest; we should observe that the crowd here mentioned, were dependent for their daily bread on the established religion, God having ordered that "they who served at the altar should live of the altar." What a

triumph of principle was it, then, to throw themselves into a persecuted church, where they became simply brethren, owning, for the Messiah, one that was hanged on the cross. But men in humble life, are frequently found more willing to cast themselves on the providence of God, than those whose wealth has generated a strong compound of pride and servile dependence on the opinion of the great. Mark here the application of the word "priests" to those under the Jewish law; and observe that Christian ministers are never, in Scripture, called priests.

It is now but fair to apprise my hearers that, though I have taken it for granted, that the seven persons here mentioned were set apart to the office of deacons, appointed for the care of the poor of Christ's church, the whole statement has been denied. If you ask why, I might reply, Because the church of Rome and others who symbolise with her, have transformed deacons into an inferior kind of ministers of the Gospel; so that men are first made deacons, in order to be made priests, and thus capable of being made bishops. Sometimes they run through the whole process in one day. It is, however, manifest that the persons we have been considering, were appointed to take charge of the poor; in order that others might "give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word." If some, therefore, affirm that these seven were not made deacons; we ask "why?" and are told because they are not called deacons. The estimable commentator, Scott, would, surely, not have concurred in this objection; if he had observed that his own church appoints this passage of Scripture to be read at the ordination of deacons. But we have seen how little importance Scripture attaches to mere names of office. The word deacon is applied to Jesus Christ, to all Christians, to civil magistrates, to Paul and his fellow-labourers, and to a female employed in the service of the church of Cenchrea. For the Scriptures teach us to mind things rather than words. They who deny this, are taken in their own net; for they cannot prove, from the use of the word in Scripture, that a bishop is distinct from an elder, or presbyter, and therefore they are obliged to fly to the fathers, who are confessed, by this very flight, to differ from the Scripture; and then, of what value are they to those who declare that "nothing is to be received as Christian truth, but what may be proved from Scripture"? If the seven are not called deacons, their administration is called a deaconship; and, because the

apostles declined to "deaconise at tables," these officers were appointed. But the most important consideration is, that deacons are afterwards mentioned as well-known officers, whose character and duties are prescribed. Now, if their appointment is not recorded here, it is to be found nowhere. Is this credible? How, then, are we to know what the apostle means by deacons? The other officer appointed in the church, the elder, or bishop, is described; but the appointment is expressly recorded. They who fly to the fathers, ought to know that Irenæus reproves those who deny that the appointment of deacons is recorded in this chapter of the Acts. But the fathers are made a *cheval de bataille*; sometimes because they really contradict the Scriptures; sometimes because it is supposed the vulgar cannot tell what they say; and when the fathers agree with the Scriptures, the very men who cry, "the fathers, the fathers," take the liberty to think themselves wiser than the fathers. It is enough for us to have found the Scriptural deacon; we may leave the modern thing, which some call by that name, to the limbo of vanity.

It should now be observed, that the office which we have seen instituted, happily accords with the genius of the Christian church, which welcomes the poor and needy, the widow and fatherless, saying, "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world?"

Because, "the poor ye have always with you;" a permanent office is appointed for their care. See how the deacons are described, 1 Timothy iii. 8—13:—"Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, nor greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

The philanthropic genius of our religion is demonstrated by this first appointment, which should, therefore, be duly considered. Heathenism was as selfish as it was false; and idolatry, to this day, disgusts by its heartless cruelties. The Jewish law abounds in kind intimations that the Father of Mercies was its author, who cared for the bodies, as well as souls, of his offspring. But

Christianity, which is the brightest display of mercy and solicitude for the eternal happiness of men, stands unrivalled in its benevolent institutions. Its officers, first appointed, were not priests, as some would have wished; nor "pastors according to Christ's own heart;" nor treasurers for their support; but deacons, overseers of the poor; as its first funds were supplied by the rich, for the support of those who were "widows indeed." This first-fruit of the infant church was an omen and precursor of the numberless benevolent institutions with which the religion of mercy has filled all lands, in proportion as it has prevailed. Were the earth covered with Christian churches, formed and regulated after the Scriptural model, there would be no need of compulsory poor-rates, or work-houses, and all that awkward legislation which, however well intended, has done as much harm as good.

The benefit derived to the world from the healthful state of the church, is seen by the consequences which followed on this new arrangement. Had the strife, which arose from suspicions of neglect, continued; or had the apostles attempted to silence the murmurs without remedying the evil; or had they persisted in attempting to do everything themselves, the church might have been split into parties, and a fatal stumbling-block been thrown in the way of the world. But the Spirit which inspired the twelve produced the happiest result. All was harmony within; without, all was victory and triumph. Such will ever be the effect of imitating their example. The internal peace of the church leaves at liberty all its resources, to be employed for the conversion of the world; while its high reputation for harmony and love gives effect to its testimony, which is so well sustained by its practice. The word of the Lord will increase in the hands of those by whom it is obeyed; for when the Spirit of truth, peace, and love, is not grieved by the sins of the teachers, "the Gospel will be preached by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." A company of the priests, obedient to the faith, will display the triumph of principle over prejudice, and will prove that "nothing is too hard for the Lord."

I cannot close, without observing, that this narrative has been strained to prove that deacons have, *by office*, the administration of all the pecuniary affairs of the church. It proves no such thing. To the office belongs nothing but the care of the poor. That churches, having no other secular officers, should have committed

all their funds to the deacons was natural ; but this delegation alone constitutes the deacon's authority over anything but the relief of the poor.

Let rich Christians here learn that our Lord caused his church to pay the earliest attention to those whom he may depress by poverty, but will, at last, exalt, by saying to those who relieve them, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, from the foundation of the world ; for I was an hungered and ye gave me meat. I was thirsty and ye gave me drink. I was a stranger and ye took me in ; naked, and ye clothed me. I was sick and ye visited me. I was in prison and ye came to me. Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it to me."

At the seventh step of our progress, we hear murmurs in the church ; but we see, also, its Sovereign Lord healing its diseases and providing officers who shall promote its prosperity, in future ages, by that care of the poor, which is its glory and its strength.

LECTURE VIII.

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR.

ACTS vi. 8—vii. *passim*.

MARTYRDOM is this day our theme. For, after seeing the apostles sacrifice to Christ their personal freedom, going to prisons, and, when liberated, returning to renew their labours, as men ready for gaol again; we are now called to remember that Christ said, "Whosoever is not willing to lay down his life for my sake is not worthy of me." Very early, therefore, the enemy was suffered to shed blood, and the friend of Christ was called to pour out his life for the Redeemer's sake. The sincerity of the apostles is shown by their leaving on record, that it was not one of their own number who first made his blood a libation on the altar of Christian truth; while we are here reminded that honours were to be associated with crosses in the church of Christ. Stephen, first in the list of deacons, was also the first martyr. It is well known that he was the leader of a noble army "who loved not their lives unto the death; overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony; not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection." But we have too large a field opened before us, in the martyrdom of Stephen, to digress further than to observe that, as this is the only narrative of a Christian's death which the New Testament contains, we must come here to learn how Christians die.

I. THE CAUSE WHY STEPHEN WAS SINGLED OUT FIRST, is assigned in the close of the sixth chapter.

Happily, we are able to say, it was all that is honourable to the Christian cause; and, alas! all that was disgraceful to the Jews; though we are compelled to confess that, sometimes, their own imprudence brings persecution on Christians, and forms some apology for their foes.

1. *All was here honourable to the protomartyr.* "Stephen was full of *grace* and power," as the reading of the best manuscript testifies. The grace of God which marked him out for office, as, by the testimony of all, most fit, justified the choice of the church, and filling all his soul, gave him favour in the sight of men. For the gracious influence of the Divine Spirit in a Christian is beautifully exhibited by the apostle Paul, as producing all that is lovely and beneficent. To this there was added "*power*," which sometimes is wanting to men of grace, leaving them gentle, but feeble, more amiable than useful. But here was the power of the lion, with the meekness of the lamb; the daring energy of the eagle combined with the sweet gentleness of the dove.

He was endued with miraculous "gifts," and was "working great wonders and signs among the people." Hitherto, we have seen these powers, only in the apostles; though others spake with tongues; but now we find one who was not an apostle working miracles. Yet it is not recorded that apostolic hands had been laid on him, to impart this gift. Such an extension of the miraculous operations of the Spirit must have encouraged and fortified the church; as it is probable that it alarmed and enraged the world. The miraculous deliverance of the apostles manifestly awed the government, and left the twelve for a long time to pursue their labours undisturbed; but what was the vexation of their foes, when they found in Stephen another apostle, in spirit and in the power of working wonders amongst the people! Ah! the event shows that the gratitude of those who received miraculous cures operated but faintly, or to a very limited extent; for the populace, as well as the government, was stirred up to shed Stephen's blood.

2. *All was disgraceful to the Jews.* Ver. 9. "Then there arose certain of the synagogue of the Libertines," &c. Four hundred and eighty, an incredible number of synagogues, the

Jews say, existed at Jerusalem ; for though there was but one temple in which sacrifices could be offered, numerous assemblies were formed, not only for reading, but also for the study of the law. There were Jews of different nations, for each one associated with those who spoke the same language with himself ; and there, at first sight, appears an enumeration of several synagogues ; though a closer attention to the Greek, leads to the conclusion that there were only two concerned in this affair ; one belonging to the African, and the other to Asiatic, Jews. The first word, " Libertines," has no reference to the English use of that term ; but has been supposed to mean freed-men's sons, whom the Romans called " Libertini ;" though it is more reasonable to conclude that the name is derived from some place in Africa, as we know that the other words, " Cyrenians" and " Alexandrians," were ; and is it probable that Jews would be designated at Jerusalem as sons of emancipated slaves ? Cilicians being Paul's countrymen, it is supposed that he belonged to their synagogue, which was frequented by the inhabitants of the Lesser Asia also. Stephen, being a Grecian, may have visited the synagogues where that tongue was spoken ; and thus by his testimony have provoked their enmity against the disciple as well as his Lord.

" But they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spake ;" for nothing can stand before that evidence of truth and superiority which attends our religion. To forbid free discussion, therefore, may be politic in the enemies ; but it is perfectly suicidal in the friends of Christian truth. Unable to fasten upon anything which they themselves heard Stephen say, the members of these foreign synagogues suborned false witnesses, " men who said, We have heard him speak blasphemies against Moses and against God." What these were, we may judge from the charge adduced, when, having agitated to action the people, as well as the elders and scribes, they fell upon Stephen, and seizing, conducted him to the Sanhedrim. The false witnesses, being induced to stand up in due form, as accusers, said, " This man ceases not speaking words against *this* holy place and the law ;" intimating, perhaps, that the court now sat in an apartment of the temple. But by their own statement, it appears, that what they call blasphemy, amounted to no more than that, " We have heard him saying,

that this Jesus of Nazareth," as they call him in scorn, "will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." This being the formal accusation, to which Stephen was called to reply, it should be kept in remembrance as the key to the understanding of his defence. There was, as usual, truth enough to colour the lie. To me, it appears certain that Stephen, with his extraordinary gifts and high destination, as the first martyr, was endued, towards his death, with an insight, peculiar to himself, into the truth, and scope, and approaching fulfilment of our Lord's prediction of the destruction of the temple, the dispersing of the Jews, and *the consequent termination of the Levitical dispensation*. That he was supposed to say *Jesus* would destroy the holy place, arose from his exhibiting our Lord as exalted to the throne of the universe; and the false witnesses chose to give this turn to his statements, in order to wake up fiercer fury against the name of Jesus. The change of the Mosaic customs *must*, to a vast extent, follow on the destruction of the temple; and the Christians who relied on the sacrifice of Christ, applied by the operation of the Holy Spirit, could not but be known to view the Mosaic rites as they are represented in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "grown old and ready to vanish away." This, which was to the Jews a provoking doctrine, was declared with peculiar clearness and force by Stephen, who received as a reward of his testimony, the proto-martyr's crown.

It was, therefore, natural that a prejudiced audience should, on hearing the charge, turn their eyes towards the accused, to see how it affected him, and to hear what he would reply. "All that were sitting in the Sanhedrim gazing at him, therefore, saw his face as the face of an angel;" which they supposed to beam with intelligence, sanctity, benevolence, immortality, energy, and bliss. These they saw in Stephen's face. For the mind looks through the eyes, the heart glows in the countenance; and when they saw courage in him whom they expected to see trembling with fear; benevolence, where they looked for anger; and delight instead of anguish, they were compelled to think of an angel rather than a man. They accused him of blaspheming Moses; and they see him, like Moses, dazzling with heavenly glory, as having caught the splendour of that world to which he was about to take his flight. Listen to

II. HIS DEFENCE, which occupies almost the whole of the seventh chapter.

The high priest, as president of the Sanhedrim, or judge of the court, having asked Stephen, if the things were so as the witnesses said; the martyr enters on a defence which naturally excites surprise, as it seems a mere history of the Jews, with scarcely a reference to his own case; as if a person tried for his life should repeat the history of England. But it should be recollected, that, on the one hand, the accusers had an historical reference to the ancient times, when Moses delivered the law; and, on the other, that the defence appears not to have been finished, in consequence of a violent interruption; so that we cannot tell how fully the conclusion might have justified the exordium. Enough, however, may be still seen to prove the wisdom by which the martyr spake. But the history, which Stephen, as a Greek, probably drew from the Septuagint, I am not called to trace, further than to show its bearing on his defence. Go to the expositors of the Old Testament for the minutiae of the history.

The grand apology for Stephen is, however, the fact, that he was not allowed to finish his defence; and we have only that part by which we can least judge of the whole. What should we say of the man who would pronounce a censure on the advocate, whose defence of a cause had just commenced, when an uproar was raised by the opposing party, to bring the process to an abrupt close? For he that pleads the cause of the innocent, before a prejudiced court, must employ in his exordium premises that shall conciliate the audience, but conceal his own ultimate design. The Jews, vain of their national distinction from the rest of the world, loved to dwell upon the history of their race, which Stephen, therefore, repeats just so far as to meet their charge without mentioning it, but proving, at every step, that a suite of revolutions had prepared the way for the last grand change of dispensation from Moses to Christ. The blasphemy against the holy place, with which the martyr was charged, he tacitly meets by reminding them, that the appearances of the Infinitely Holy One, which had distinguished their fathers, were not in the temple, nor even in the Holy Land, from which their nation had been more than once removed. Won by a tale to which they loved to listen, they

had unawares admitted so much truth, that, when they began at last to catch a glimpse of its bearing, expecting that the inevitable conclusion would fall upon them as a thunderbolt, they escaped by a disgraceful riot. Who can tell what would otherwise have been the peroration, by which an orator is known?

Addressing the court as men, brethren, and fathers, he called them to hearken to one who claimed kindred, as having become a Jew, though a proselyte; as Paul addresses *Gentile* believers, and says, "Abraham, our father;" for, "they who are of the faith, the same are the children of Abraham." Stephen may, however, like many other proselytes, have descended from a Jewish mother.

He calls the God of Abraham, "the glorious God," as the phrase he employs signifies; and reminds them, that, by a great change in God's dealings with man, the father of the faithful was called, not in the Holy Land, "where you dwell," to which they attached all sanctity; but in Mesopotamia, before he approached even so near as Haran, where he lingered, some time. Abraham never inherited a foot of the holy ground; though it was promised to his seed when he had none: so early God taught them not to judge by appearance, but to wait the development of his plans. From the first, the sojourning and residence in Egypt for four hundred years from the time when God spake, was foretold; though a prediction of departure from Canaan, as the church's holy ground, was charged on Stephen as a crime. The covenant of circumcision is here shown to be, as our Lord says, "not of Moses, but of the fathers;" and Paul proves that Abraham was called and justified without circumcision; so that its abolition would not even change the customs which Moses delivered. The envy of the patriarchs who sold Joseph into slavery, where God made him a prince and their deliverer, taught the Jews that their envy against Jesus, whom they crucified, but God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, was in harmony with their ancient temper.

The delicate subject of a holy place is touched, when God is shown to command Moses to take off his shoes, for the place where he stood was holy ground; though it was neither the temple, nor Canaan, but the desert, where God appeared; that the Jews might learn to consider every part of the earth holy, where God afforded his presence. But the parallel between

that Moses whom Stephen was accused of reviling, and that Jesus whom the Jews blasphemed, is more broadly displayed. "And now come, saith God, I will send thee: this Moses, whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? him God sent a ruler and a deliverer, who said, A prophet shall the Lord raise up to you like me—first persecuted and miraculously delivered in infancy; then, when raised up, rejected, but made at last a deliverer and lawgiver; receiving the lively oracles to give to us."

Moses commenced the written revelation of the Old Testament, as Christ was the author of the Christian Scriptures—each giving a new dispensation; though the Jews turned away in their hearts to Egypt, saying, "Make us gods, for we know not what is become of this Moses," for whom they are now so jealous; while they turn away from the prophet who was to be like Moses. Michaelis contends that Moses promised a succession of prophets, to save Israel from consulting soothsayers. For their idolatries, even then, God threatened to carry them beyond Babylon; and what if Stephen thus interpreted by the event what Amos said of Damascus, and now threatened them with the general dispersion, which they were bringing upon themselves? That very tabernacle which was the germ of "the customs that Moses delivered," was made in the desert, and brought into the possession of the Gentiles by Jesus, which was the Greek form of the name of Joshua; as Jesus of Nazareth would introduce his religion into the Gentile world. If David, who perfected the conquest of Canaan, found favour with God, this was no proof that Messiah, Son of David, was to be a conqueror by war; for, though David desired to build a temple, God said, "Thou hast shed blood; Solomon, thy peaceful son, shall build me a temple." But the prophets declared, that "the Most High dwells not in temples made with hands." This appeal to their own Scriptures provoked them, as designed to justify the declaration, "Jesus shall destroy this holy place." And Stephen, seeing that they would not suffer him to finish his defence, closed with an awful reproof of them, as "stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart, which their own prophets had called them;" Moses expressly declaring, "The Lord has not circumcised your *hearts*;" the true circumcision, of which that of the flesh was but a sign. "Ye do always resist the Holy

Spirit, as your fathers did ;” which was distinctly affirmed by the prophet Isaiah : “ They rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit ; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and fought against them.” “ So do ye,” said Stephen, seeing their resistance to that Spirit, who spake by him ; and their rage, on finding themselves unable to answer him.

But, their murderous intentions becoming visible, he asked, “ Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted ? They killed those who before announced the coming of the Just One.” Though the history of the prophets, like that of the apostles, is passed by in mysterious silence ; we are informed, that “ some were persecuted unto blood ;” and the Jews say, that Isaiah was sawn in two, and Jeremiah stoned to death. Now might Stephen recall what Luke records of Christ’s preaching ; vi. 22, 23. But the martyr may here allude to John the Baptist, who especially told of Christ’s coming, and whose death the Jews are said to have plotted, though they contrived to throw the blame on Herod. “ Of that Just One (Jesus), when come, you have been now the betrayers and murderers ;” as truly as Judas was the immediate traitor, and Pilate, with his soldiers, the actual murderers. That the crucifixion of Christ was a judicial murder, to be accounted for by the Jews, is here asserted, in justification of that with which Stephen was charged ; a declaration that Jesus would destroy their holy place, and take from them the kingdom of God, by changing the dispensation which Moses delivered to them. They pretended to have acted from zeal for the law ; but he shows that though they had received it through ranks, even thousands of angels—for “ the Lord was among them in Sinai, in the holy place”—yet they had not kept the law ; as Christ had told them, “ None of you keepeth the law.” Our translation, by “ the disposition of angels,” is unintelligible ; but Paul says, “ The law was ordained by angels ;” and that “ the word was spoken by angels,” who were employed in the giving of the Sinaite covenant. For not merely the decalogue, or ten commandments, but the whole of the revelation which Moses received, during forty days in the mount and through all his life, must be kept in view ; and how much the ministry of angels was then employed, we cannot exactly tell.

III. THE EXECUTION OF THE MARTYR closes the chapter.

This was not the formal conclusion of a regular trial, but a riotous act, abruptly terminating the legal process ; though the Jews justify such a proceeding in what they deem cases of blasphemy, calling this the judgment of zeal. No proof, therefore, can be drawn from it that the Jews had now the power of life and death. But the Jewish authorities seem to have connived at this act ; because Pilate had now been sent to Rome, to answer for his conduct, and no Roman governor had yet taken his place. We turn to

1. *What occurred in court.* Hearing these things which Stephen last spoke, the whole assembly were cut to their hearts, by the truth of the word, which is sharper than any two-edged sword, and gnashed their teeth at him, as if they would devour him. Alas ! they had no better answer to give to a speech which turned the defendant into an accuser, and treated the judges as criminals and murderers. The pride of authority, and the stings of a guilty conscience, could not suffer him to go on ; and he, seeing his doom was sealed, turned his eyes from earth to heaven, and, full of the Holy Ghost, saw the divine glory, which fills heaven, not in any form, as Moses said to Israel ; and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, which signifies the place of supreme authority, before which angels bow ; “ for to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit at my right hand ? Are they not all ministering spirits ? ” But, for sitting, we here read “ standing,” which is naturally supposed to intimate, readiness and activity to protect and receive the martyr ; as if the Saviour could not keep his seat, but rose to invite and fetch the martyr to the skies. He proclaimed the loving kindness of his Lord, saying, “ Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” Stephen may have known Jesus in the days of his flesh ; and that he saw and knew him now cannot be doubted, whatever may be said of the impossibility of seeing a human body at such a distance. For light and vision are but creatures of God, who can vary them at pleasure, and give our eyes the power of the telescope, which brings near the satellites of Uranus ; and as Stephen had been empowered to work miracles in the name of Christ, that Lord might deem it fit to work one upon him, who was to lead the army of martyrs, and show them how Christ regarded those who die for his sake. “ The Son of

Man" was a phrase which our Lord often applied to himself; and the Jews knew that Daniel had said, "I saw one like the Son of Man come with the clouds, to the Ancient of Days, and there was given to him dominion and glory." But, as if shocked with blasphemy, the Jews raised a loud cry to drown his voice, and stopped their ears, turning up the lobe over the meatus, say the rabbins. Sad omen of the fulfilment of the sentence: "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." They rushed upon him with a guilty unanimity, so that all appearance of judicial procedure was over, and, without waiting for sentence, or for authority, they proceeded to execution, which conducts us to

2. *What was done out of court.* Since they cast him out of the city, as so profane that his blood would defile it, they must have dragged him a great way, through those very streets which he had cheered with his miracles of healing, and where the sick had been laid to catch the shadow of Peter. Proceeding to stone him, by taking the law into their own hands, they still make some show of complying with the law, which ordered that, when any were stoned for blasphemy, the witnesses who heard it should first lay hands on the criminal. The *martyrs*, therefore, for so the original calls the witnesses, because martyr simply signifies witness, formally stripped off their upper garments, and laid them down at the feet of a young man named Saul, whom they trusted with the keeping of them, as knowing him to be of their synagogue of Cilicia. The Jews, it is said, were accustomed to lead up the condemned to an elevated place, whence they threw him down violently on the stones, and, taking up one of the weight of two men, threw it on him, to despatch him at once; but when this failed, the multitude threw stones on him till he died. Little did they think how soon that young man, who now kept their clothes, would bring upon himself their enmity by owning that name for which Stephen died!

They stoned Stephen, invoking and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." It is to be regretted that our translators have given "calling upon God," which is not in the original, and which obscures, or even contradicts the truth, that the martyr, with his last breath, which the stones were beating out, called upon Christ, and committed his soul to that Saviour whom

the open heavens revealed at God's right hand ; meekly leaving his body to be crushed to death, as saying,

“ If I am found in Jesus' hands,
My soul can ne'er be lost.”

Thus we are taught to commit our departing spirits to the Lord Jesus, who committed his own spirit to his Father's hands ; and to make no resistance, as if unwilling to die, or as if desirous to give blow for blow, and save ourselves from death, by inflicting it on our foes. Shall I say it is revenge enough, or bliss enough, for us to know that we are ready to die, though they are not ?

He thinks, indeed, of his persecutors ; but, kneeling solemnly down to pray, he cried, with a loud voice, that the noisy crowd might hear and learn, “ Lord, lay not this sin to their charge !” They had beheld him commit his own soul to the Lord Jesus, and now hear that, from the same Lord, he asks mercy for themselves, that they might know they lay at his mercy, who could impute or remit the guilt of the crime they were now committing. While Stephen shrunk, with awe, at the thought of his blood being laid to their charge, he showed them that, if their religion made them persecutors, his made him triumphant over the fear of death and the sense of injury, in imitation of that Jesus who said, “ Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Thus simply the Scriptures narrate the first martyrdom for the faith, and the only Christian death which they distinctly record. How different from the strain of the martyrology in which a corrupt church glories, that taxes men's faith till it is turned into credulity, by fables of doves flying out of the martyrs' wounds, or fountains of water springing thence to extinguish the flames,—to say nothing of those who, when decapitated, carried their heads in their hands ! Verily, the spirit of error has been compelled to show that nothing can be trusted but the Scriptures of truth. Fathers and martyrologies supply the dark shades, which bring out to view the brightness and glory of the inspired lights.

For we are now called to improve the events we have reviewed, by observing, that the protomartyr died appealing to the lively

oracles which Moses first received to give to us. For God spoke with his own lips, and wrote with his own finger, those ten words which were the commencement of a written revelation, and which were laid up in the ark of the covenant, to teach us that the advantage of the Jews was "chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God." These were followed by the five books of Moses, to whom succeeded the prophets. The pretended oracles of dead gods mimicked these living words, which were the chief glory of Israel, above all rites and ceremonies, or temples, or the promised land, with all the wonders which gave it to them as a possession. To these oracles Stephen appealed, because the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

To this testimony the Jews stopped their ears; for they had made void the law by their traditions. The comments of rabbies had overwhelmed the text of prophets, and, with a pretended zeal for Moses, they rejected Him whom Moses had foretold as like himself. But true religion, corrupted and turned by the traditions of men into superstition, becomes false, proud, cruel, and murderous. It builds the sepulchres of the prophets, and nourishes the spirit by which they were slain. Popery, the rabbinism of Christianity, and sometimes wearing the Protestant name, turning from the lively oracles of Scripture to the traditions of the fathers, has become a harlot, drunk with the blood of the saints. For superstition, the religion of him who was a murderer from the beginning, loves to quaff blood from martyrs' skulls.

The disciples of the cross must, therefore, prepare for the world's worst, that they may find it Christ's best. "Ye must, through much tribulation, enter the kingdom of heaven; and the time will come when whosoever killeth you will think he doeth God service." For the Christian character is consummated in death. But for this record of the martyrdom of Stephen, we could scarcely have conceived how completely God has predestinated us to be conformed to the image of his Son, who shed no blood but his own. To live as Jesus lived, is crowned by dying as Jesus died. Here the meekness of wisdom shines amidst the might of martyrdom; and the safety of our own souls is seen by our solicitude for the forgiveness and salvation of our mur-

derers: heaven is opened to us when earth is closed against us; and, hedged round with murderers, our spirit leaps into the bosom of a Saviour, to join the chorus of the noble army of the martyrs.

For need I now say that the necessity of being ready for martyrdom may affright, but cannot excuse, those who reject that Jesus who is the king of the martyrs? I know, indeed, that some have said, with a sneer at religion, and a smile at their own politic apostasy, "Every man has not the spirit of a martyr." So much the worse for many. For where is the prudence of refusing to lay down your life for Him who has it at command? To say nothing of those who make themselves martyrs for war, or in a duel, for their own lusts, which they will not do for Christ; I ask whether you can keep that life which you refuse to sacrifice for religion? You may deny Christ in the morning, thinking you have by it saved your life, and die before night, to your eternal ruin. Our life is always in Christ's hands, and we must resign it whenever he pleases to call for it, whether in mercy or judgment. "Yield yourselves to Him as those who are alive from the dead," and your life is safe; for your death is blissful to yourself, glorious to Christ, and beneficial to the world.

Here, if ever, we may envy a man his death. How many ways we must turn to see Stephen depart! His spirit! He sent it up to the glory, where Jesus waited to receive it, borne on angels' wings, amidst glad shouts of triumph, to receive that sentence which compresses into a moment the felicity of ages—"Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." His body! He fell asleep. Sweet is the sleep of the grave bedewed with the tears of the pious, which water the amaranthus that springs there till the resurrection of the just. His blood! I will not tell how heavy it falls on the murderers; but see how it sinks into the soul of that young man who said, "I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God; for, when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I stood by and consented to his death. These hands caught the drops of that precious blood, and, though God has forgiven me, I can never forgive myself! Call this death? It was springing to life, amidst a blaze

of glory and a rapture of bliss. "Let me die the death of the righteous, though at the martyr's stake, and let my last end be like his."

The eighth stage of our march exhibits the Gospel sealed in death, by the leader of the noble army of martyrs, whose blood became the seed of the church, but the seed of the Gentile church; for his blood, shed by the Jews, cried to heaven against them, and caused the kingdom of God to be taken from them and given to us.

LECTURE IX.

THE GOSPEL GOING FORTH FROM JERUSALEM INTO THE GENTILE WORLD.

Acts viii.

WE are this day made to stand where Ezekiel “saw the glory of the Lord above the cherubim in the most holy place; and the glory went up from the cherubim and stood over the threshold of the house, and the house was filled with the cloud, and the (outer) court with the brightness of the Lord’s glory. Then the glory of the Lord departed from off the house, and stood over the cherubim, who lifted up their wings and stood at the east gate of the Lord’s house: and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, and the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood on the mountain which is on the east side of the city.” Ezek. x. and xi. Jerusalem has begun to shed the blood of the witnesses for Jesus; and we are now to see the glory of the Lord depart from the holy place, to the threshold of the house, and move out of the midst of the city, to the distant mountains, to hover over foreign lands. For the fall of the Jews was the rise of the Gentiles; and the impoverishing of Jerusalem enriched the surrounding lands. Behold the signs of the times! The “Prince Messiah was to confirm the covenant with many (Jews) for one week” of years; and they are drawing to a close.

I. THE FIRST GENERAL PERSECUTION. Ver. 1—4.

Saul's consent to Stephen's death belongs to the preceding chapter ; and his history, to the lecture on his conversion.

The church at Jerusalem, which had been honoured with the first smiles of heaven, endured the blast of the rising storm. There was a great persecution against it ; since the very existence of a church of the redeemed in a world of sinners, is designed to display the conflict between good and evil, for the instruction of all worlds ; to bring out to view, that, as religion is essentially benevolence, so sin is malevolence, or selfishness. A true church may be persecuted ; and the false will persecute. So fierce was the storm, that all the disciples were scattered through the country of Judæa and Samaria, being driven from their homes ; and, whenever they appeared in the streets, pursued till they quitted the walls.

But why was it said, "Except the apostles"? To their honour, and that of their Lord, this was recorded. They, unlike the hireling, who seeth the wolf coming, and fleeth, leaving the sheep to be destroyed, imitated Nehemiah, who said, "Should such a man as I flee?" Besides, their Lord had made them terrible to their foes, who, doubtless, said, "Of what use is it to imprison them? We shall only hear another story of angels delivering them." It may, however, be asked, "Of what use is it for the shepherds to remain, when the flock is gone?" They remained as the staff of a regiment, whose soldiers were dispersed, or slain in battle ; but which may be restored, or replaced, and will need to be officered, disciplined, and led to battle again. We soon find a church re-gathered at Jerusalem. So impotent is persecution, which feared to touch the ringleaders ; though we should have expected it to say, "Smite the shepherds, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." Whether we *must*, when persecuted in one city, flee to another, depends on circumstances.

The funeral of Stephen is introduced here, as if it occurred, not according to Jewish law, immediately after death, but after some interval. Perhaps the body, like Achan's, was left overwhelmed with stones, as unworthy of a decent burial ; and the first fury did not suffer the Christians to pay him the last honours due to the pious dead. But, when the storm was lulled, "devout men removed the heap of stones, and bore him

to the cemetery, pouring forth great lamentations." "Alas! dear brother," they cried, "we weep not for thee! thou hast swiftly run thy glorious race, and seized the prize; but for ourselves we mourn, who, more sluggish, are left behind, bereft of thy bright example, instructive converse, and fervent prayers. But, O my country! O Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent to thee; how wilt thou answer, when heaven makes inquisition for blood? Will thy last prayer, departed saint, prevail, that the Lord may not lay this sin to their charge? or did heaven answer, It was well that this was in thy heart, but thy prayer has returned into thy own bosom again?" For these tears of the pious, antiquity has assigned to Stephen the vulgar honours of a pompous funeral.

As for Saul, he ravaged the church, like a wild beast, that, having once tasted human blood, thirsts for more. Some stings of conscience, doubtless, irritated and frightened him, when he thought of the holy calmness of the martyr, his heroic courage, and benevolent intercession for the murderers; and, above all, his declaration, that he saw at God's right hand Jesus, to whom he committed his departing spirit, left stings in Saul's heart. But as he, "entering into houses, and dragging men and women, committed them to prison," we learn that some were left in Jerusalem; if it were only those who, through infirmity, or attendance on the sick or aged, could not flee. The mention of women, seems intended to show that the tenderness due to that sex, so unfit to be thrown into prison, was disregarded. They who made their boast of the law, had not "learned what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." The prisons were filled, but with joyous prisoners, and the houses deserted, as if to anticipate the fulfilment of the threatening, "your house is left desolate;" while the Gospel was carried whither we must now follow it, contemplating—

II. THE FIRST FLIGHT OF CHRISTIANITY, BEYOND ITS BIRTHPLACE.

This directs our mind to the persecuted; to notice their journey, and their visit to another city.

1. *The journey of the dispersed confessors was made a missionary tour.* "They that were scattered abroad passed through the country, preaching the word of glad tidings." Driven from

their abodes, and made wanderers through the land, they raised no lamentations, and much less uttered they revengeful execrations; but told good news. For what though they had forsaken their homes? "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." "Ever since I knew Christ," said one of the ancient confessors, "I have had no country but heaven." Joyous in that inheritance, they sought to gladden others, by telling them the way to obtain it through Christ.

Here we learn the folly of that argument employed to make the deacons ministers of the word—that Stephen, the first of them, and afterwards Philip, preached. For *all* that were scattered abroad, preached. It is mere superstition, or priestly assumption, to confine the right of preaching to the pastors of the churches. He that is able to preach has a right to preach; yet the church has a right to determine who shall do this in the church, which is the best judge of its own edification. The wide world is, however, open to all who have the ability and the heart to tell the good news of salvation. Let him that would forbid, show his authority. We know him that said, "Forbid them not." As to the supposed evils that may arise from this liberty of prophesying, they are nothing compared with the mischievous consequences of imposing restraints where Christ has left us free. How our Lord "makes the wrath of man to praise him!" They who stoned Stephen fancied they had caught up a fire-brand, and flung it out of the city, to prevent, or extinguish, a conflagration. But see, they have only flung the lighted match, to kindle a train which has set the country on fire; and, wherever you turn your eyes, the blaze is spreading, confined by no walls.

2. *The entrance of the Gospel into another city*, however, is next to be considered. Philip went down, a day's journey, to a city of Samaria, and preached Christ to them. Thus the martyrdom of the first deacon is followed by the mission of the second. Our Lord had said, "Ye shall be witnesses to me, in Jerusalem, and Judæa, and Samaria;" and in this order we see the testimony delivered. The country round Jerusalem had brought even the sick to Peter; and now, what their countrywoman had put to the Samaritans as a question, "Is not this the Christ?" Philip announced to them as a fact. We have seen in the life of Christ, that he who was rejected by the Jews, was welcomed by the

Samaritans, to whom he said, "Ye worship ye know not what; for salvation is of the Jews." Of them the blessing is now received; for "the crowds attended, unanimously, to the things spoken by Philip; and while they were hearing, they were also seeing the miracles he wrought. Unclean spirits came out from the possessed," raising a shriek, which roused the attention of all; many paralytics, incurable by men, were healed; and lame persons, whose case was notorious, were enabled to walk. Such benefits, so hastily recorded, were rejected by Jerusalem, and were enjoyed by Samaritans. Thus the first is last, and the last first. In that which should have been the holy city, a furious tiger raged, spreading terror and desolation; where a mongrel race dwelt, a heavenly messenger, welcomed, diffuses joyous tidings and miracles of grace. "So there was great joy in that city" where Philip preached, and silent sorrow where Stephen bled. Sad omen of the state to which Jerusalem has been since reduced. But the joy of a city of Samaria was the triumph of truth over persecution, which may change the site, but cannot terminate the existence, of the church; may create sorrow where it reigned, only to send gladness, where the objects of its envy are out of the reach of its malice. Oh that the victories of the Gospel may cause it to be said of London, "There was great joy in that city!" For, it is not the wealth which commerce brings, nor the splendour which the arts diffuse, nor the security afforded by the perfection of municipal administration, that can save great cities from being the seat of bitterest woes, which result from the effervescence of vicious masses. The all-pervading influence of evangelical grace gives great joy to a city.

3. *The detection of a notorious impostor, in Samaria, affords lasting instruction to the church.* There was a certain man, named Simon, formerly, in that city, practising magic, so called from the eastern Magi, and astonishing the multitude, saying of himself that he was something great, which, strange to tell, will induce some to think that, because he said it of himself, it must be true. But the real greatness of the apostles is seen in their humbly saying, "Why look ye at us, as though by our own power or piety we wrought miracles? we are mortal men like yourselves." To the boaster all had attended, from the small to the great, saying, "This is the power of God that is

called great." But they attended to him ; because that, for a considerable time, he had astounded them by his magical tricks, and, like the Gnostics, of whom he has been made the father, attached mystery to words, and called his pretended familiar spirit *Megale*, the Greek word for *great*. God taught his ancient people to pour contempt on pretences to magic, or sorcery, or dealing with familiar spirits ; not to suffer among them that which was so pernicious to the heathen, who often made their magicians a set-off against Christ and his apostles. Christians should defy and abhor all pretences to conjuring and fortune-telling. But when " the Samaritans believed Philip preaching the good news of the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus, and were baptized, not only the men, but the women, who are often most taken with pretences to magic, Simon himself also believed and was baptized." A large field is open for reflection, when the same man is said to believe, who afterwards is declared to have a heart not right in the sight of God, and to be destitute of any portion in the Gospel. In another text, men's hearts are said to be purified by faith. It is evident, therefore, that faith is employed by the sacred writers in more than one sense. It always consists in believing ; but much depends on what is believed. Simon, doubtless, believed all he knew, and no one can believe more. But he knew, what?—the reality of the miracles ; conscious that what he pretended to were mere deceptive tricks ; and he knew that Philip spake of a kingdom, to which Simon attached no other idea than that of temporal rule ; and of the name of Jesus, which the impostor supposed was a wonder-working word. But all that spiritual truth which constitutes the essence of the Gospel he knew not, and, therefore, did not believe. We may speak of men as believing, though we may add, " the devils also believe and tremble ;" but when we say, " Ye are saved by grace through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God ;" we mean, that " faith of God's elect," which is the effect of " the spirit of revelation in the knowledge of Christ." Simon was baptized, as others were, on the first profession of faith, and adhered to to Philip, whose powers and great miracles astonished him. What his ruling motives were, will, in some measure, appear by what follows.

For the apostles in Jerusalem, standing on the watch-tower, to superintend the affairs of Christ's kingdom, heard that Samaria

had received the word of God. The Jews, doubtless, heard it too, and were vexed; though they might affect to say, "These Samaritans are ignorant heretics." But the apostles sent to them Peter and John, who no longer "wondered that the Lord spake with Samaritans." Peter was sent! His pretended successor would spurn this as an insult. Who would presume to send a Pope? The two apostles "being come down, prayed for the new converts, that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for as yet He was fallen upon none of them, only they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus." But on whom they laid their hands the persons received the Holy Spirit, and "Simon saw that by the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given."

Here is a host of truths, to war with the errors that were early introduced into the church. It was the prerogative of apostles alone to confer, by the laying on of their hands, the gift of the Holy Spirit; though God sometimes conferred it without even their hands. Bishops afterwards pretended to the same power, of which they could give no evidence, though here even Simon *saw* that a gift was conferred. To cover their shame, the pretenders to apostolic power changed the whole nature of the gift, and represented it as consisting in an inward, invisible, sanctifying grace; though the Scriptures prove that it was an extraordinary power which made itself known to all. To give the Holy Spirit, to change the heart, and save the soul, was never in the power of the apostles themselves; for it belonged exclusively to their Lord and ours. But the imparting of miraculous gifts, being the prerogative of the apostles, settles the question of the continuance of these powers in the church. They ceased at the death of the last man on whom the apostles had laid their hands to impart the gift; and all pretences to them afterwards were imposture or delusion. Rome professes to possess them still; but "lying signs and wonders" are the revealed marks of the man of sin.

But mark how the false professor was distinguished. He saw what *others* had received; for if *he* had obtained even the miraculous powers, would the apostle have said, "Thou hast *no* part in this matter"? The dew of heaven fell on all around, but his fleece was dry. He seems to have been so desirous of conferring the gift, as to have overlooked the reception of it himself; and, seeing the effect of the apostles' hands on others, not to

have waited for his own turn. To obtain the influence which he thought it would give him, he "offered the apostles money; saying, Give me also this authority, that on whom I may lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit." He knew he made money by his old arts, and hoped to make more by what he seems to have regarded as a new and more mighty magic. "Like Balaam, he ran greedily after the *rewards* of divination." When Peter said, "Thy money may go with thee into perdition, because thou hast thought to purchase the gift of God by money;" some would say, "Why so severe, if it were only a thought?" But "the thought of foolishness is sin, and as a man thinketh in his heart so is he," which Simon here showed; for the thought was father to a bribe. Had he not seen Peter bestow the blessing, "without money and without price"? This was the first time that money was introduced into the church as an agent of corruption, and it was necessary to smite with a thunderbolt that which afterwards did so much mischief. He who had seen Ananias and Sapphira smitten for keeping back money, justly repelled with indignation a corrupt offer to give.

For what did it indicate? "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this word," (or "faith," as the Syriac says,) "for thy heart is not right before God." "Thine eyes and thy heart are not but for thy covetousness," said God of old, and the offer which Simon made proved his self-seeking. "I will give you money, if you will give me power." Peter taught him that the genuine participation of the Gospel includes a heart made right in the sight of God, who purifies our hearts by faith in Jesus, and that this is proved by correspondent conduct; but that Simon had shown himself destitute of all share in the blessing. Yet he had been baptized by apostolic men. Thus the Scriptures pour contempt on the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. Woe to the man that trusts to it. Ten thousand woes await him that preaches it. But this comes of admitting into the ministry men who have no other regeneration than can be conferred by baptism, which left Simon, with a heart not right in the sight of God, to go to perdition. But concerning the preaching of the Gospel Peter teaches an important lesson, when he says, "Repent, therefore, of this thy iniquity, and pray God, if thus the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee; for I see thee in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity."

Some, wiser than apostles, affirm that it is contrary to the Gospel, to exhort an impenitent sinner to repent and pray for pardon ; because this would imply that he has the power, while the Scriptures say we are " dead in trespasses and sins." Thus they set Scripture against Scripture. But all this contradiction arises from confounding natural and moral ability, a distinction which a child understands, and these cavillers employ when it suits their purpose. To exhort men to do what they have no natural ability for, is, indeed, absurd ; and who would call either saint or sinner, to pluck down stars ? But the only inability to repent and pray which we lie under is moral, consisting of disinclination. For we have all the natural faculties which suffice, if we had the right inclination. But exhortations are properly employed where the disposition, or inclination, is all that is wanting. To show that here lies the fault, and that, if we are helpless, it is only because we are wicked and inexcusable, God chooses to employ exhortations to repent, believe, and pray. For he retains his right to claim all that we ought to be, even if we have no inclination. It is the assertion of his right, and our duty, that God accompanies with the grace of his Spirit, to make men repent and pray.

With what surprise must Simon have heard Peter say, " Thy money may go into perdition along with thyself ; because thou hast thought that the gift of God is to be purchased with money." This is generally considered to be an imprecation ; because the verb is in the optative mood, which, however, is often used, to express what would follow, if certain circumstances should precede, by which it becomes equivalent to the subjunctive, or conjunctive mood. Luke viii. 9 (Greek). I cannot think that the apostle first uttered an imprecation, and then exhorted the unhappy man to ask forgiveness ; and, therefore, I consider the former part of the sentence, as expressive of the perishing nature of money, and not of any curse ; while the words, " with thee," are a warning that Simon might perish as well as his money.

No one that understands the Gospel could do as Simon did ; and no one that could do as he did, could believe anything more than the historic facts ; the accompaniments and seals of saving truths. But, if it be said, that Simon was not benefited by his baptism, because he was not sincere in his belief, we need not stop to show that the inspired writer says, he believed ; and that

he betrayed no insincerity, but openly offered the apostles money, and proved, that ignorance, not deceit, was the characteristic of the man, who sincerely believed all that he knew, which fell miserably short of the saving truth. If a man must *truly* believe, before his baptism can benefit him, then he is already regenerated, before he is baptized; for an apostle declares, that "he who believes that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." Away, then, with that murderer of souls, baptismal regeneration!

The thought of Simon's heart, that the gift of God could be purchased, is pronounced a sin that needed to be forgiven, and a proof that his heart was not right in the sight of God; so that Peter says, "I see thee in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." This fearful exhibition of a state of nature should make every unregenerate man tremble. For what avails such a faith as Simon's? It may be sincere, but such ignorance shows a heart not right in the sight of God; and, then, though the whole universe should think us right, the heart-searching Judge condemns us. We are in the very gall of bitterness, for "the carnal mind is enmity against God;" and so bitter is that gall, that the enmity of sin would kill God if it could; and when he dwelt among us, it did kill him as far as it could. The aim of sin is against God's throne; and, to conquer his authority, the deadly thing would destroy his being. The "bond of iniquity" is added, to express the unrighteousness of that state of mind which is bitter enmity to God, who deserves no such dislike, but merits that love which he demands.

All that the apostle's exhortation produced on Simon was his request, "Pray ye to the Lord for me; that nothing of what ye have spoken may come upon me." They who pray not for themselves, sometimes ask the prayers of the righteous; and this man seems not to have understood, or, at least, not to have regarded, what was said of his present state, but to have been merely alarmed at the thought of future perdition, thinking, perhaps, that *this* was the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. Blind to their depravity, sinners think of no other salvation than deliverance from future punishment; though the bitterness and bondage of sin is a present hell; and, unless removed, must be perpetual perdition.

Ecclesiastical history represents Simon as the first Heresiarch, the leader of the Gnostics, though Vitringa thinks it improbable

that a man smitten with an apostle's censure, could ever have acquired the influence which this notion assumes him to have obtained. Justin Martyr has related strange things concerning the adoration of Simon at Rome, which the learned have shown to be a mistake. We have been told, too, that Simon met with Peter at Rome, where the magician attempted to triumph over the apostle, by flying into the air, through force of magic, but was brought down to death, by the apostle's prayers. But Simon's flight, and Peter's labours at Rome, are equally flights of fancy.

The apostles, having borne their testimony, and spoken the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, through the villages of the Samaritans, in which they proclaimed the glad tidings. For they who went boldly to capital cities, where there were the greatest numbers of men, and where they braved all the learning and power of the world; never despised the villagers; since God had said, "He would save the *tents* of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem may not magnify themselves." Samaria and her villages receive the Gospel, and Jerusalem is left desolate!

We have now to see

III. THE GOSPEL SENT TO A REMOTE HEATHEN LAND.
Ver. 26, to the end of the chapter.

Samaria was in a kind of medium state, between the Jews and the Gentiles; and when the Gospel came abroad from the city where it began to be proclaimed, having visited, first, those whom the Jews most despised, it was, immediately after, "sent far hence to the Gentiles."

"It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; though it is the glory of kings to search out." By Him who "brings the blind in a way which they know not," two persons are here conducted to a meeting blindfold. He who makes choice of the ministers by whose mouth the elect may believe, sent his angel to say to Philip, "Arise, and go towards the south, into the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza," which, with the surrounding country, then lay in the desert state to which Alexander reduced it. Philip probably thought of nothing but the design of God to fill the south of Palestine with the knowledge of the Gospel, after the disciples had gone northward from Jerusalem

to Samaria. But, instead of spreading the report of salvation in another part of the Holy Land, the mission of Philip was to a native of a far distant heathen realm; passing (oh, awful omen!) by Jerusalem, which lay between Samaria and Gaza. For, "behold, a man of Ethiopia," on the south of Egypt, towards the tropics, a hot country, whose inhabitants were called *αιθίοψ*, "burnt faces"; and "can the Ethiopian change his skin?" This man was of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who are mentioned by the ancients as constantly governed by queens, called Candace; as the Egyptians were by Pharaohs, and the Roman empire, by Cæsars. What we render "eunuch" strictly signifies "chamberlain:" the Syriac calls him a "faithful man, treasurer to the Queen." His rank was high, and his office important; but these had not prevented his taking a journey to Jerusalem, to worship the living and true God; strange as this must have appeared to his countrymen, who thought the idols of Ethiopia better than the God of the despised and depressed Jews. But he was one of those for whom Solomon prayed, at the dedication of the temple: "When the stranger, who is not of thy people Israel, comes from a distant land, for thy name's sake; for they will hear of thy great name and thy mighty hand; and shall come and pray in this house, then hear thou."

Hundreds of miles he had travelled, passing through Egypt, the cradle of the arts and of idols; and, turning his back on all that was most venerated in antiquity, this stranger had worshipped in the temple, and was now returning. He showed a heart absorbed in his errand; for, not satisfied with the performance of the rites which were limited to the temple, he was reading the Book of Prophecy, as he sat in his chariot, taught by Him who said, "This book shall not depart out of thy hands."

It would seem that reading is employed here, according to the import of the Hebrew word, audible reading, which would be very remote from our ideas of propriety; but the Orientals read *aloud*. The false shame of our country is unknown to many others. The Spirit which sent its messenger, having commanded him to go and join the chariot that contained a person reading, Philip ran up and heard him. Not doubting that he was sent to teach, Philip introduced himself by asking the Ethiopian, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" For

“let him that readeth understand,” said our Lord, the Great Teacher. The Scriptures lie in the sense, and not in the sound. A translation which conveys the divine ideas, is the word of God. To understand this should be our aim; for only as far as we are instructed are we benefited. The repetition of certain sounds may satisfy superstition; but the Author of religion “opened the understanding of his disciples, that they might understand the Scriptures.” This is the great object of the evangelical ministry, “to open men’s eyes, and turn them from darkness to light;” as David prayed, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law; for the entrance of thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple.” It is the truth which God honours with his blessing, and the knowledge is essential to the belief of the truth, which brings salvation. He, therefore, that is the best teacher, is the best preacher; and everything should be done by simplicity of style and felicity of method, to make men understand what they read.

Far from being offended by a question which some would have thought rude, the Ethiopian asked, “How can I understand, except some one guide me?” Wishing to learn, he requested, at the same time, Philip to come up into the chariot, and sit by him. The place in which he was reading serves to show the unaltered state of Scripture, for *you* know where to find the passage, which is pointed out, not by chapter and verse, but as usual in Scripture, by a few words, of the 53rd of Isaiah: “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter,” &c. But some may notice a minute difference of expression, along with the identity of thought; and may ask, Which is more correct, this, or the text as it stands in our Bible? I answer, Our reading in the Old Testament is more exact. Some may say, then, Why give a less correct reading here? This is one of the incidental proofs of the truth of the narrative. For the Ethiopian was doubtless reading, not the Hebrew original, which our translators have faithfully followed; but the Septuagint, or Greek translation, which contains what we have here. The Jews themselves had ceased to speak Hebrew, and it was probable that a proselyte from among the Gentiles would know the Scriptures, only from a translation into Greek, which was made in Egypt, and extensively used; because the literature, and science, and arms of the

Greeks had spread their language over the world. The sacred historian, therefore, records the facts as they were, even though they were not as they ought to have been. Thus, what appears at first derogatory to the claims of the New Testament—a defective translation of the Old—proves at last its strict truth. It should, indeed, be known that the Greek version, however defective, was, like every other, sufficient to show “the mind of the Spirit” in the Scriptures.

This man, having been at Jerusalem, may be supposed to have heard of Jesus; but being of high rank, his information would be derived from the rulers, who had crucified Christ as an impostor. Just at this time, the Christian church being expelled, there may have been a dead silence on the most interesting of all themes. But the passage open before him afforded the black man an occasion to ask, Of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself? or of some other? To know Him of whom the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah speaks, is to know the way of salvation. The Jews are continually stumbling here. They say the prophet speaks of himself; or of the nation of Israel; or of Jeremiah; or Hezekiah, or Josiah; but without a shadow of reason.

“Philip, therefore, opened his mouth and began, from this Scripture, to tell the glad tidings of Jesus.” I am not now called to be an expositor of this prophecy of Isaiah; except so far as to show how these verses apply to the case before us. Philip taught that the ignominious death of Jesus marked him out as the Lamb of God, led to the slaughter, to die for our sins. He was deprived of an equitable judgment; and who shall declare, or describe, the generation among whom he dwelt, by whom his life was taken away? See Luke xi. 29—51: “All righteous blood is charged on that evil generation.” For the Hebrew proves that here is no reference to what is termed the eternal generation of the Son of God.

The Ethiopian learned that “the Lord laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all; that, by his knowledge, he should justify many, having borne their iniquities; that he should divide a portion with the mighty, because he poured out his soul unto death:” the whole of the Gospel. It appears, that Christ’s leaving to us a charge to preach the Gospel to every creature, and baptize them, was among the truths which Philip taught; and, therefore, when they came to some water, the treasurer said, “Behold water;

what hinders me to be baptized?" intimating that, wherever there is water, a person may be baptized. But this can be true, only on the supposition that any quantity may suffice; for, if to baptize were to immerse the whole body, there might be water in a thousand places, where we could not baptize.

We are now led to notice, not the subject of baptism, but the mode; to which I attach comparatively little importance; because I am satisfied, that it is contrary to the spirit and the letter of the New Testament, to ascribe importance to forms and modes. We all act upon this principle, in the other positive ordinance, the Lord's Supper, at which we never make a supper; but consider that the smallest quantity of bread and wine satisfies the intention of the Founder, though far from answering the ordinary signification of the word "supper." The application of water to the body, "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost," is baptism, however the mode of administration may be varied.

Marginal comments have sometimes crept into the text, of which verse thirty-seven is no part. When the Ethiopian had proposed the question, "he ordered the chariot to stand; and Philip consenting, they both descended to the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him." That this was done by immersion, has often been supposed evident, from their going down into the water. But, in the first place, the original words may, with propriety, be rendered, "they went down to the water, and came up from the water;" and, in the second place, as they *both* went down into the water, and one of them, Philip, was not immersed, there is no proof that the other was. But it may be said, Why, then, go down into the water? I might reply, Nothing more can be proved from the Greek, than that they went down *to* the water; but as I believe they did go into the water, I would remind you, that this was to them, in one sense, a necessary, and in another, a trifling affair; for they either wore a sandal, a kind of sole, easily slipped off, or went barefoot; and, in a hot country, they made no scruple to walk into the water, as they still do into the Ganges, up to the knee, and there take up water and pour it over their heads. This, which is the Indian mode of bathing, or ablution, I believe to have been the mode of baptism adopted here. Thus the sign both represents the thing signified, the pouring out of the Holy

Spirit ; and best accords with the baptism of three thousand in the latter part of one day, at Jerusalem, where it is incredible that they should have been immersed in that time, and in a locality where, we may say, there was no water. With regard to females, many reasons exclude the notion of their being immersed ; for to whatever part of the body the water of baptism is applied, *that part must be naked*, otherwise it is the dress, and not the person, that is baptized. If antiquity is pleaded for immersion, antiquity would prove that even the females were baptized naked. They who baptize by affusion would, in like circumstances, as surely go down into the water as Philip did ; and there illustrate the prophecy which the Ethiopian had been reading, “ So shall He sprinkle many nations.” Isaiah lii. 15.

Immediately after the baptism, the Spirit of the Lord snatched away Philip ; probably, to confirm the faith of the Ethiopian, who found that this “ interpreter, one among a thousand,” had been sent by heaven, which had recalled him again, in what way we know not. But he, on whose lips the convert hung with delight, had vanished, waiting for no reward from the rich treasurer, and was never more seen by him who was now to be, in his turn, a messenger from heaven to his native land. Thither he went, rejoicing on the way at the mercy which God had displayed. It is at once easy and difficult to conceive of his delight, when he found himself alone, pursuing his journey homeward. “ What has God wrought ? I went up to Jerusalem half-blind, and return seeing all things clearly ! I had found the true God, who was worshipped there, though knew not the meaning of his rites, nor what to think of the Messiah he had promised. But now, I see that all the sacrifices pointed to Jesus, as the great propitiation ; and “ the chastisement which procured the peace I now enjoy, was laid on him, that by his stripes I might be healed.” Richly have I been rewarded for my journey ; and I would gladly go to the ends of the earth for such discoveries as are now poured into my mind. I return to my country, to tell strange tidings, which shall be to all people a spring of blessings. Will they receive my testimony ? Shall my country men be blessed in him whom the Jews rejected ? Shall I see the fulfilment of the words, ‘ Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands to God’ ?”

The travels of Bruce into Abyssinia, which once excited.

general attention, laid open the remains of an ancient Christian church in the south of Egypt; and in spite of the almost universal suspicion, or incredulity, with which he was assailed, subsequent travellers have given to his testimony substantial confirmation. But if we must trace the history of a Christian church in Ethiopia up to the convert of Philip, how fallen, how degraded, how wretched, is its present state! Ethiopia scarcely differs from those lands that never heard the Gospel.

One remark yet remains to be made concerning this narrative. It records, not the conversion of the Ethiopian from sin to God; for, he that had, by force of truth, become a nonconformist to the religion of his country, and, braving scorn, had turned his back on the gods of the nations, to worship the living and true God, whose word was his meditation all the way, gave good proofs of genuine religion, which welcomed the Saviour as soon as he was made known. The conversion of this man, therefore, was an advance from Judaism to Christianity; from the ancient dispensation to the new; from faith in a promised Messiah to belief in him, as come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Jews crucified, but God raised from the dead. Though he that had worshipped God as revealed in the Old Testament, was then accepted; to him might now be said, "Blessed are thine ears, for they have heard what prophets, kings, and righteous men, desired to hear, but heard not."

Ecclesiastical history considers this man as the apostle to the Ethiopians, and there can be no doubt that he carried to them the glad tidings of the Gospel; though Philip was not an apostle, nor a minister of the *word*, nor had he ordained the treasurer to be a minister. The church of Ethiopia, therefore, originated with what would be called a layman; but the Scriptures know no such term, except it be included in the phrase, people (*λαος*, *laos*) of God, the appellation of the whole Christian church.

But "Philip was found at Azotus," or Ashdod, about thirty miles from Gaza; though, when Enoch was taken, "he was not found." The deacon, satisfied that he had accomplished the object for which he was sent into the south, moved northwards, preaching in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea, where we shall meet with him again. Acts xxi. 8.

Can we close this review of the first expansive movements of

the Gospel—from Judæa to Samaria, and from Canaan to Ethiopia—without recalling the word of God, “My ways are not your ways”? Nor should we fail to remember, that, while we bear in our bosoms the message of mercy, and hold ourselves ready to extend the honour of our Redeemer’s name, we may not only welcome the small still voice, that calls us to the solitary desert; but may smile at the storm that scatters us to the ends of the earth.

For this ninth lecture reminds us how soon the martyr’s blood becomes fruitful, by extending the sphere of the Gospel through Judæa, Samaria, and even Ethiopia, which we may call the end of the earth, as Homer terms its inhabitants, ἔσχατοι ἄνδρων.

LECTURE X.

THE CONVERSION OF THE APOSTLE PAUL.

ACTS ix. 1—31.

THAT God does not usually employ, for the conversion of sinners from the error of their ways, miraculous interferences with the ordinary laws of nature, we know; but that he never will, as he has not said, we have no right to assume. The introduction of a new dispensation of religion, itself a moral miracle, is deemed by him, and felt by all, to be a fit occasion for the employment of physical wonders, to prove that he who never changes his mind has changed his ways, and that the new claim upon our faith and obedience comes from him who made, who controls, creation, and will call us, his creatures, to account.

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus was one of those miraculous works which accompanied the introduction of Christianity, and forms a most convincing evidence of its truth. To the consideration of that event we should bend the more eager attention, as it forms the nucleus of the Acts of the Apostles, which were written to record the founding of the Christian churches, to whom were sent the apostolic epistles, fourteen of which were from the pen of Paul. His life and labours will henceforth be our principal theme, now that the conversion of the Ethiopian is to be followed by that of all nations.

I. THE PREVIOUS HISTORY OF THE APOSTLE SHOULD BE KNOWN.

We are invited to consider this, when we hear him say, "My manner of life know all the Jews." From various circumstances it appears that he was born about the same time as our Lord; at Tarsus, "no mean city;" for this metropolis of Cilicia is supposed to have been so ancient as to have derived its name from its founder, Tiras, the son of Javan. It was so celebrated for its learning as to be almost a rival to Athens, or Alexandria; and imperial Rome, itself, received philosophy, before it learned Christianity, from one born at Tarsus. Jerome's account of the apostle's native place contradicts the Scripture. The parents of Paul were among the myriads of Jews who, at that time, were settled in the heathen lands around Judæa; but it was not from the place of his birth that he derived the privileges of a Roman citizen; a distinction which seems to have been acquired by his family, either for money, or as a reward for services rendered to Cæsar in the civil war. To the apostle of the Gentiles this citizenship was a passport through the world. That he was of the tribe of Benjamin, he affirms; but by the expression, "a Hebrew of the Hebrews," it is uncertain whether he means that his father and mother were Jews, or that he used the Hebrew language in the reading of the Scriptures, while many others, being ignorant of it, employed the Greek.

Though his parents were wealthy, he was taught to make tents for soldiers, which, being of skins or leather, led some to call him a cobbler. The Jews deemed it so much a duty to teach their sons to earn their bread, that he who neglected this, was said to make his child a robber. Their most distinguished rabbis, therefore, were called by such epithets as the baker, and the tanner. Though strict Jews *now* denounce heathen literature, Paul's writings show that he early obtained the classical knowledge for which Tarsus was celebrated; but he assures us that his *Jewish* education was at Jerusalem, where he was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, the most famous rabbi of his day, whom we have seen interposing on behalf of the apostles. By him, who was a Pharisee, young Saul was "taught, according to the most perfect manner of the law of the fathers;" so that he afterwards said, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee," which signifies one separated, by his superior strictness, both from the common mass, and from the Sadducees, a latitudinarian and sceptical sect.

Saul was a precocious scholar, who "profited above many who were his equals in years;" and no one can read his writings without perceiving that his mental force would raise him to distinction, in any pursuit to which he brought the fervour of his soul. This he devoted to the religion of his fathers, with all the pride of bigotry, thinking he was "alive while without the true knowledge of the law, and that, touching the righteousness which is by the law, he was blameless." He could, therefore, appeal, afterwards, to his fiercest persecutors, that he had "lived in all good conscience towards God."

His sins against Christ and the church, which he bewailed through all his future days, were the fruit of a mistaken conscience, as he says, "I verily thought I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, which I also did;" though he was so far from considering this an excuse, that he said, "Of sinners I am the chief, not worthy to be called an apostle." "When the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, O Lord, I gave my voice against him." We have seen him, not only keeping the clothes of the witnesses, but also "breathing out threatening and slaughter, breaking into the houses where the Christians worshipped, and dragging to prison both men and women; causing them to be scourged in the synagogues, and compelling them to blaspheme." A Jewish prayer against apostates is on record, which is said to have been aimed at the Christians, and composed by one of Gamaliel's disciples, named Saul. "A chosen vessel," he says, "it pleased God to separate me from my mother's womb;" for he who chose his church out of a race of fallen creatures, often defers their calling, till they have acted so as to display the sovereignty of his grace, and make them walk humbly all their days. Bear, then, with transgressors; still cherishing hope of the worst of men; for you know not but God may forgive them, make them blessings where they have been a curse, and cause you to clasp to your bosom those who have sought your blood.

II. THE CONVERSION OF SAUL.

This occurred when he had carried his fury against Christians so far as to persecute them to strange cities, asking from the high priest letters to Damascus, where Christians soon abounded, that he might bring such as he found there bound to Jerusalem,

to be punished. Damascus is the capital of what was called Damascene Syria, standing at the foot of Mount Hermon, and watered by Abana and Pharpar, divided into so many streams running through gardens, that it was called Paradise. It was a common saying, "He who had never seen Damascus had never seen pleasure." Here many Jews dwelt, and when Aretas, father-in-law of Herod, was king, he gave them the jurisdiction of their own people in ecclesiastical affairs; and the Romans, who had proclaimed, had not actually made war on this tributary prince. Passing by Jerome's fable, that the city derived its name from Cain's shedding the blood of Abel there, where another persecutor was converted; we turn to show

1. *The manner of Saul's conversion.* He was journeying with an escort from government, to guard the prisoners whom he expected to bring back; and it was now the middle of the day, when he drew near the city, which bursts upon the traveller's view, on turning a certain point of the mountain chain of Lebanon. If Saul's unhallowed zeal exulted in the view of its prey, "the triumphing of the wicked was short;" for, suddenly, from a quiet scene, as the Syriac expresses it, "a light burst forth above the brightness of the sun." If the day were cloudy, this made the sudden brilliance more striking; or, if there were a clear sunny sky, a light that outshone the sun must have been most startling. Ignorance, joined to presumption, may have pronounced this an impossibility; but science has shown that light may be increased to any degree of intensity. That of the sun might be augmented a hundredfold. Whence did this light proceed? From the face of the Saviour, enshrined in glory. For as none could help looking up to see whence this sudden splendour proceeded, Saul saw the Lord Jesus; as Ananias soon after said, "The Lord Jesus appeared to thee in the way; for the God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldst see that Just One;" and the Lord himself said, "I have appeared to thee, to make thee a minister and a witness of those things that thou hast seen." He, therefore, asks, "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Christ Jesus the Lord? Though last of all, he was seen of me." That Saviour "whom the heavens must receive till the times of the restitution of all things," pierced those heavens with the beams of his glory, above the brightness of the sun, to give Saul the sight of Himself; and, against all that

may be said of the impossibility of seeing a human form at such a distance, I oppose what was said in defence of Stephen's seeing Christ in heaven.

Under this weight of glory, Saul staggered and fell to the earth, probably from a horse, or chariot; overwhelmed with those terrors which have always seized mortals on whom celestial visions have burst.

While on the ground, he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" But though he had seen in the skies One of dazzling glory, he either had never seen Christ in the flesh, or knew him not again, if Stephen did; and, therefore, Saul asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" But might not he, who came hither to persecute the disciples of Jesus, have suspected that it was He who asked, "Why persecutest thou me?" To me it seems indubitable that he did suspect it; but there was enough of perplexity thrown around the question, by Christ's asking, "Why persecute me?" to induce a terrified creature to soothe himself, by thinking that he was persecuting men on earth; and as to that one in the skies, he bowed and hailed him, "Lord," at that moment subdued by a power divine, which gave him at once to "see the Son, and believe on him," for "no man can call Jesus, Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."

The Lord answered, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." That word, Jesus, the Jesus "whom thou persecutest," owned by him whose glory had been seen surpassing the brightness of the sun; Jesus *of Nazareth*, as, in another passage, we find that our Lord added, though Saul had thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, must have been a dagger to the heart. Conscious, perhaps, that he had often wished he could treat Jesus as he did Stephen and others, he felt the force of the charge, "Thou persecutest *me*." At the same time, he saw that, by love, this Jesus identified himself with his disciples, and took all that was done to them as done to himself. Nor could Saul answer the question, or show *why* he had thus persecuted; for when a furious persecutor comes to his senses, he wonders at his own unreasonable cruelty and hate.

"It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks," or goads, does not appear to belong to the chapter before us; but to have been taken from Paul's narrative to Agrippa. As I design, however, to give the whole history, I would here observe, that the phrase

employed by Christ is derived from goading oxen forward in the plough, which made the animal kick and plunge, only to his own wounding; for he was still compelled to submit and obey. Saul, therefore, felt that it was vain to resist Him that reigned in glory, and the tamed lion was no longer "disobedient to the heavenly vision."

Trembling and astonished, he asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" for unbelief, enmity, and rebellion, were now exchanged for faith in every word that Jesus spake, reconciliation to a crucified Messiah, and obedience to the Man of Nazareth, as the Lord of glory, whose will is law. Thus the heart is bowed instantaneously to the obedience of faith; and, from this time, Saul gave thanks to God, "who always led him about in triumph," a trophy of the almighty grace of Christ.

As the whole company fell to the ground, while Saul alone was the object of the miraculous interposition, we are first told, that "the men who journeyed with him stood astounded, hearing the sound, but seeing nobody;" though, in the twenty-second chapter, Paul says, "they saw, indeed, the light, and were afraid, but heard not the voice of him that spake with me." Beza thinks the voice which the attendants heard was that of Saul, whom they supposed to be so struck with the light as to be bewildered, and to imagine he was answering when no one had spoken. But as Christ spoke in the Hebrew tongue, either properly so called, or put, as usual, for the Syriac, Saul alone may have understood it, while to others it was a mere noise; and as hearing is often put for understanding, they are said not to hear the voice, or speech. It was certainly not the design of Christ that any, except the chosen vessel, should see him and hear the words of his mouth.

In answer to the question, "What wilt thou have me to do?" our Lord said, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what it is necessary for thee to do;" and, from the twenty-sixth chapter, it appears that the following words were added: "for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those in which I will appear to thee, delivering thee from the people, and the Gentiles, to whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God; that they may receive

forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them who are sanctified by faith that is in me."

This promise of future appearances to Saul, which was faithfully accomplished, must have been most consoling to him, who was now sent forth to the Gentiles, dead in sins, but mad upon idols. Glorious was the embassy; to open their blind eyes, to transfer them from Satan's power to God's favour, and to confer forgiveness of the guilt of sin, and the blessed inheritance which awaits all whom faith in Christ purifies from its pollution. All this was performed to thousands, through the apostle's ministry.

Having obeyed the command, "rise and stand upon thy feet;" Saul found, on opening his eyes, that he "could not see, for the glory of that light;" and for three days, he was totally blind. He that gave Stephen to see his Lord, without injury to his sight, chose to leave Saul to what might be deemed the natural effect of a brightness above that of the sun at noon; and to make the blindness of the body a means of shutting out this world; while, for three days, he reflected on the former blindness of his heart. But he that has seen Christ, may be satisfied, though he should see nothing else.

Led by the hand of those who journeyed with him, who saw not Christ, but saw all the world beside, Saul went, blindfold, whither Christ sent him, to do what he bade him. Conducted into Damascus, not, as was expected, a ravening and a roaring lion, but changed into a meek and patient lamb; he dwelt there in the house of one Judas, or Judah, probably the person with whom he had previously engaged to lodge; and there remained in awful quiet, not only blind, but unable to eat or drink, for three days. For the shock given to his frame, as well as the change which had passed on a mind now occupied with new views of his past life, and new prospects for the future, deprived him of inclination, or ability, to take food. But as all the moral and intellectual part of the miraculous scene was utterly unknown to his attendants; it is probable that they, and the persons with whom he lodged, thought of nothing but his being struck blind, and almost killed by lightning. We are now to advance to—

2. *His introduction to the fellowship of the saints.* There was, in Damascus, a disciple of Christ, who, being devout accord-

ing to the law, had a good report even from all the Jews, who abounded, as they still do, in that city. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias;" and he replied, "Behold me, Lord." "Arise," said the Saviour, "and go into the street called Straight;" which some say still exists by that name, running through the city straight as an arrow. "At the house of Judas," which seems to have been known to Ananias, "inquire for one called Saul, who is of Tarsus." To make the visit more satisfactory to both parties, the Lord said, "Behold, he is now praying, and has seen in a vision a man whose name he is told is Ananias, coming in, and laying his hand on him, that he may see again." He was now praying, as he never did before: and what more natural than that he should ask for the instructions promised to be given him at Damascus? though, perhaps, he knew not but he was to remain all his days blind, that others might see.

At the name of Saul of Tarsus, Ananias started, as when they cry, "A lion!" He said, "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, what evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind with chains all that call on thy name." Saul's arrival, therefore, was known, but not his change. The Lord said, "Go; for this is a vessel of election to me;" as was manifest when, out of a whole company, this man alone was called by name, saw the Lord, heard his voice, and was reconciled, and made a friend and minister. "He is chosen to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." Though Saul attracted the notice of Jews, his mission was to the heathen world, and no man so frequently appeared before kings; because, alas! none was so persecuted by the children of Israel. For, "I will show him," saith Christ, "what he must suffer for my name." Paul, therefore said, "The Holy Ghost witnesseth to me, in every city, that bonds and afflictions abide me."

Ananias was satisfied to embrace a chosen vessel, who had before thirsted for his blood; and, going to the house of Judas, laid his hands on the blind man, saying, "Brother!"—yes, "Brother—Saul; the Lord sent me, Jesus, who appeared to thee in the way, as thou camest here;" which shows that the Lord related the whole affair to Ananias, though this is not previously mentioned. "He sent me, that thou mightest see

again, and be filled with the Holy Ghost, in all miraculous powers, for the confirmation of the Gospel. Brother Saul, receive thy sight." "Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales," which showed that his blindness was not slight; but such an affection of the eyes as if they had been scorched by the blaze of Christ's glory, and would never have been recovered, except by miracle. He could see again; and the first object which met his eyes was a Christian brother, a benefactor; as the last he had seen was Jesus, the Saviour. This miracle was admirably suited to confirm his faith, as well as to draw out his love. "The same hour I looked up upon him," as Saul relates (chap. xxii.), "and he said to me, The God of our fathers has chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness to all men, of what thou hast seen and heard. And now, why tarryest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." That the Lord had already forgiven him when he appeared to him, to make him a minister and a witness, that others might receive forgiveness of sins, there can be no rational doubt; and Ananias had already laid his hands on him, that he might be filled with the Holy Ghost; which shows that the washing away of his sins, by baptism, was the public sign and testimony of forgiveness, which had previously taken place before God; as "Abraham, our father, received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, being yet uncircumcised." Saul arose, and was baptized, and was publicly recognised a pardoned sinner, a believer, a brother, a member of the Christian church, an apostle to the Gentile world.

3. *The commencement of his labours and sufferings.* His mind being calmed and comforted, he could now take food, and his sinking frame was strengthened. "Going into the synagogues, where he had intended to be an inquisitor, he preached Jesus, that this is the Son of God," who said in the second Psalm, "I will declare the decree: the Lord said to me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." Then "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish." "They were all astonished, exclaiming, Is not this he who destroyed those who invoked this name," Jesus, in Jerusalem, and came hither to throw them into chains? But Paul was the more invigorated by these remarks, pressing

upon the Jews that this is, indeed, the Messiah; and "having confessed Christ, departed." He went, after some days, into the surrounding country of Arabia, to consult Christ, "not flesh and blood," and then fulfilled the mission to the Gentiles, as we learn from Galatians i. 16, 21.

On his return to Damascus, the Jews there, unable to argue, made the converted persecutor feel what it is to be persecuted; they "watched the gates day and night, to kill him." The disciples, therefore, succoured him who had designed to persecute them, and "let him down by night in a basket, from a window on the wall of the city." "After three years, therefore, he went up to Jerusalem, to see Peter, the Apostle of the circumcision. But the believers were afraid of him, not believing him to be a disciple, till Barnabas, who early became his companion, took him to the apostles, Peter and James, and told how he had seen the Lord in the way, and had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. They were satisfied, and gave him the right hand of fellowship; and he was with them fifteen days, "coming in and going out at Jerusalem."

But when the Grecian proselytes at Jerusalem, vexed at being confuted, sought the life of the apostle; the disciples conducted him to Cesarea, not to Cesarea *Philippi*, for this last word would then have been added; but where the Romans would protect him. Thence brought to his native city, Tarsus, he says to the Galatians, "Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia." It is remarkable that not a word is said of his ministry at the place where we may suppose he displayed his heart's desire, "for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh, that they might be saved."

In attempting to turn this history to account, by suitable reflections, we feel that wealth may be more embarrassing than poverty. For we are overwhelmed by a crowd of claimants for notice. How much might we here say of our Lord, of his enemies, of the world, and of the church, as well as of Paul!

Who can duly reflect on the part which the Redeemer acted in this grand scene, and not bow before him in profound adoration? What overwhelming power he displayed! What simple dignity! What divine wisdom! What sanctity, combined with pardoning mercy! What consciousness of sovereign, irresistible authority! Is it possible to miss the tone of Deity, or deny that

he appears here as the God of the Christians? He calls the criminal to account, asking why he persecutes; and then bids the saint Ananias, go and baptize the vessel chosen to bear Christ's name to Gentiles and kings. Majesty and mercy, authority to do what he pleases, and grace to do beyond all that we could ask or think, exhibit the "just God and the Saviour!"

But who can see the blaspheming persecutor smitten to the ground, blinded, dark through excessive brightness, terrified by the simple question, "Why persecutest thou me?" and, humbly asking the despised Nazarene, as his Lord, what "he would have the trembling creature do;" and not exclaim, "What are sinners in the hands of an offended God?" "He has ordained his arrows against the persecutors," and "can thy heart endure or thy hands be strong, in the day that I shall deal with thee? saith God."

What a lesson to the world was Saul's conversion! Lord Lyttleton's Essay on it may not be known to many of my hearers; but some may be aware that he pronounces this one fact, a sufficient evidence of the truth of Christianity. All objections may be reduced to two: that Paul was a deceived enthusiast, or a hypocritical deceiver. That he was not the latter, we may be sure. For what had he to gain, by professing the Christian faith? Jesus had been already rejected by the authorities of his nation, and crucified as a blasphemer, when this young Pharisee, of good connexions and prospects, suffered the loss of all things, by professing to be convinced of his Messiahship. A life of unparalleled persecutions and a martyr's death, was all that he gained or could expect. If popularity and influence among the rising sect of Christians might be supposed to allure him; these were evidently not his aim, nor his unalloyed prize. For he flung away his popularity with many, by his zeal in behalf of justification by faith alone, without works of law, which drew upon him contradiction and censure from the numerous Judaising believers, whom he "withstood to the face."

That he was not a deceived enthusiast, moon-stricken, or maddened by lightning, may be proved, by all his subsequent life and the numerous letters which he wrote, as well as by the narrative of Luke, the historian of the Acts. Is it possible for a man to give better evidence of a sound judgment rationally con-

vinced of an important truth than that which the apostle's whole Christian life affords? Watch him in the most trying circumstances; listen to him, when defending himself before senates, governors, and kings; and say where are the marks of the mad-dened enthusiast? Could wisdom, herself, better act her part? We are surprised at what I might almost call the coldness and reserve with which he relates scenes that might be expected to inflame passion and throw reason off her guard. For it was the story, and not the narrator, that made Festus say, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." And what can surpass the reply? "I am not mad, noble Festus; but speak the words of truth and soberness. The King Agrippa knows the things I speak." But read his letters, and say, whether they are not weighty and powerful; consistent and sensible. Whether he argues against Jews, or heathens, or prejudiced and erring Christians, he appeals to reason, and to Scripture, to the judgments, the consciences and the hearts of men. Here, indeed, he displays emotion and pours forth a torrent of eloquence; but it is on themes which make the most rational most enthusiastic—the day of doom, the rising dead, and the consummation of all things.

Nor should it be forgotten that the narrative of his conversion and his subsequent life, was not written by himself, but by Luke, the beloved physician, whose history of Christ and of the Acts of the Apostles, is acknowledged, by all competent judges, to be a Greek composition of singular purity, good sense, and quiet eloquence. It is no small argument in favour of the truth, that such a writer evidently believed the story of the man with whom he was so intimately associated.

To the church of Christ Paul's conversion is a mine of wealth. We may here learn somewhat of our Lord's calm dignity in treating a furious persecutor. Let the feeble be violent, the strong may keep their temper. What shame would cover us, if we could not now forgive our bitterest foe! How dull must we be, if we do not expect light to arise out of darkness, victory to spring from the bosom of calamity, and persecutors to preach the faith which once they destroyed! Among the vessels of election, how many a Saul of Tarsus may yet be transformed into followers of him who said, "They glorified God in me!"

Of the subsequent history of this convert it is necessary to

observe, first, that he, three years after, went up to see Peter. But why Peter only, except that the others were not to be expected there? Saul, indeed, tells the Galatians, that he saw none but Peter, except James, the Lord's brother, who seems to be introduced as unexpected. When there, Barnabas is said to have brought Saul to the apostles, not the twelve, as we might have supposed, but only two are intended. It seems, therefore, that, though the apostles were not, at first, driven from Jerusalem in the storm which followed Stephen's martyrdom, they, soon after, dispersed, to preach in various places. None but Peter, and James, the Lord's brother, are mentioned when Paul went up to what is called the council at Jerusalem.

Paul's conversion has been variously dated, from A. D. 34—36. His journey to Jerusalem, from 37—39. Matthew, then, is, after 39, not to be found in Judea, and, in that year, may be supposed to have written his Gospel, and departed on a foreign mission, as the ancients testify and internal evidence proves.

Having collected whatever is said of Saul's conversion through the whole book of the Acts, I shall consider the event as known, and shall not comment on the passages which present it to us again. Our tenth stage of advancement shows apostles quitting the Jews, when our Lord calls and sends the apostle of the Gentiles.

LECTURE XI.

THE MIRACLES WROUGHT ON ENEAS AND DORCAS.

ACTS ix. 32 to the end.

PROPHECY is fulfilled: "the lion lies down with the lamb;" the envenomed foe to the Christians has become a devoted friend; "he who persecuted us in times past, now preaches the faith which once he destroyed;" the storm is exchanged for a calm; and the sacred historian says, "Then had the churches rest through all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria; and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."

This is the first time that we meet with the plural, "churches;" for, the mother church having been dispersed by the fury of the enemy, instead of one, we have many. Again, our Lord "taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and turneth the counsel of the wicked headlong." As soon as the preaching of the Gospel in Samaria and the adjoining villages multiplied the churches, Luke shows the unscriptural character of the modern language, that makes all the Christians in a whole nation a church. "But be ye followers of the churches which, in Judea, were in Christ Jesus;" where there were as many churches as congregations of faithful men. The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church, but "the fruit of righteousness is" reaped as well as

“sown in peace.” “And the churches had rest,” built up of living stones, during this season of quiet, “and through all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, walking,” or advancing, “in the fear of the Lord, were multiplied.” Happy they who improve a time of peace for their advancement in that “fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom!” They best show their gratitude to “Him that giveth peace to his people,” and best prepare for those storms which we must still expect, till we reach “the fair havens” of eternal rest.

By the *animating* influence of the Holy Ghost the churches were multiplied. This is the sense of the concluding word of the verse. Our translation is too limited; more than consolation is conveyed by the original, which signifies animation of soul imparted to Christians, the Holy Ghost not suffering them to pervert peace by idleness, but stimulating them to those efforts which multiplied, not Christians only, but churches also.

Of these efforts we have a record in the labours of Peter, first at Lydda, and then at Joppa; in both, accompanied by miraculous power.

I. THE MIRACLE WROUGHT AT LYDDA ON ENEAS. Ver. 32—35.

The apostle of the circumcision was improving the storm which scattered the mother church, and the lull in the storm, by passing again through all the churches; and coming down, he arrived at Lydda, on the north-west of Jerusalem, where there were saints, or holy persons, dwelling, whom he visited, to minister to their edification. For, though there were churches formed, we read not that pastors were set over them; this being, probably, deferred till their advancement in knowledge and holiness brought forward some among themselves equal to the arduous task. Meanwhile, the twelve apostles travelled and visited them, to their great edification and delight. It is worthy of your special notice, that “the saints” is the term here applied to Christians; though some make it the butt of profane ridicule, and others appropriate it to apostles and martyrs, or those on whom the Pope has conferred the title by canonisation. It would have been thought, in primitive times, strange to say “Saint Peter,” when all Christians were saints; but “the apostle Peter” was the proper style, for all were not apostles.

If antiquity gives a special claim to saintship, why not say Saint Abel, Saint Noah, or Saint Moses?

Peter found at Lydda a certain *man* named Eneas, who is not called a disciple, but is merely said to have been eight years keeping his bed, afflicted with palsy. It is well known that this disease affects the seat of vitality and motion, and is, to a considerable degree, beyond the reach of human aid.

When it has, for a long time, affected the frame, it renders the person's case almost hopeless; and who would pretend to effect a sudden, an instantaneous, a perfect cure? The pitiable, hopeless condition of a paralytic, should excite our gratitude, that we have been saved from his lot; and while it made the case of Eneas a fit object for the compassion of the Saviour, the length of time, eight years, made it so notorious that the cure would spread abroad the fame of the Gospel.

It is not said that any application was made to Peter, either by the afflicted man, or by his friends; but He who is "found of them that sought him not," directed the attention of his servant, and induced him to display the freeness and sovereignty of divine goodness, by saying, "Eneas, Jesus, the Messiah, healeth thee." For our Lord's Messiahship was the grand truth to be proved, in Immanuel's land, where the enemies intended and hoped, by the cross, to refute his claims. Here, therefore, was Christ's power proclaimed, as that "which heals all our diseases." His grace, too, was thus rendered conspicuous, when, after all that had been done to him in that land, he looked upon its inhabitants, and chased away their griefs. The humility of his apostle ascribed the healing power directly to the Lord, in whom Peter reposed such trust that, before the event, he proclaimed, as if he saw it, "Jesus heals thee."

"Rise, and strew for thyself," or spread smooth the bed, or mattrass, on which thou hast so long lain, dependent on other help. This spoke the confidence of Peter, not merely in the sequence, but in the perfection of the cure; that the paralytic would not only be able to rise and stand, but to use his arms also, instantly. It was done. "He immediately arose." Is this all that is said of a miracle which would, in any other book, have been blazoned by all the arts of eloquence? The apostle, apprised of the design of his Lord, spoke what he knew would follow; and the sacred writer records it as one who knew that

“many such things are with Him,” “who only doeth wondrous things, for his mercy endureth for ever.”

This was known to all the dwellers in Lydda, and in the adjoining parts; whether the town or plain of Saron, celebrated for its fertility and beauty, is uncertain. “They turned to the Lord,” which was the ultimate design of the miracle. The universal terms we have seen employed, where nothing more than the generality of the inhabitants is intended. In small towns and rural districts, what happens to one is made known to all, for there men scruple not to satisfy themselves, by visiting their neighbours. They saw him, now healed, who had been known, for eight years, lying on his bed, a helpless paralytic. The effect of this miracle was to multiply the churches, as did another, which we may pronounce still more glorious.

II. THE MIRACLE WROUGHT AT JOPPA ON DORCAS. Ver. 36
—to the end of the chapter.

Here the circumstances were far different; for the subject of the miracle was dead, and the apostle was sent for by those who knew the power with which he was endued from on high. Observe

1. *The favoured recipient of the miracle.* The place of her residence was Joppa, that we may call the ancient sea-port of Jerusalem, to which Solomon induced Hiram to send the timber felled in Lebanon, for the building of the temple. Its modern name, Jaffa, is familiar to us by the Crusades and by Buonaparte's expedition into Syria. Here had lived a female disciple of Christ, called Tabitha, in Syriac; but interpreted, in Greek, by Dorcas, both words signifying a kid. The good works and alms-deeds, of which she is said to have been full, proved her faith, at once sincere and vigorous. But she who was so nobly celebrated, fell sick and died; though, as in the case of Lazarus, “this sickness was not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.” She was washed, according to ancient custom, and laid out, as we should call it, in the upper room, of which we have already had occasion to speak. But as Lydda was within a few miles of Joppa, her friends had heard the fame of Peter's visit, and “they sent two men to him, exhorting him not to think it too much trouble to come.” They do not say “to raise the dead,” which we know not to have been yet done by an apostle; though the disciples may have remem-

bered that Christ commissioned the apostles to "raise the dead!" While mourning the loss of this benefactress to the poor, they durst ask, only a visit from an apostle. Yet, perhaps, they said, "who knows? The world around may call us mad to think of help, when death precludes all hope; but we know him that can 'do exceeding abundantly above all we ask, or think.'"

2. *The conduct of the apostle.* Ver. 39. "He arose and went" with them, doubtless, under the direction of him who had justified the confidence of Peter, when he said to Eneas, "Jesus heals thee." Arrived at the house of mourning, they lead him up to that chamber on the roof where the corpse was laid out, to prevent defilement from the dead, which the Jews dreaded. Around the pale, cold clay, stand "the weeping widows, showing the tunics and garments, which Dorcas was making while she was with them." "Thus was she employed," say they, "till death snatched from us our best friend. Alas, that it should take away those whom earth can so ill spare." Did they thus seek to move the compassion of Peter, that he might ask from heaven the restoration of so much piety and benevolence to the world and to the church? He seems to have been disturbed by the obtrusiveness of their grief, not all pure, perhaps, but mingled with the selfishness which poverty often betrays. He put them all out. Alone with the dead, he turns to the living God, and kneeling down by the corpse, like Elijah of old, he prayed, and his prayer was heard, of which, being assured, he turned and spake, where there was none but the dead to hear. "Tabitha, arise," was spoken to a corpse. The dead heard, for the God of the Spirits of all flesh sent back the soul from Hades, and "she opened her eyes, and, having seen Peter, she sat up." The warmed life-blood, that had been stagnant, flows again; and he, at whose prayer she returned to life, giving her a hand, raised her up. What a moment for them both! What a display of that truth, "to God the Lord belong the issues from death." "I kill and I make alive again." Weeping widows, return; but dry up your tears; for "Peter calls the saints and widows, and presents her alive." Behold your sister, your benefactress. What hath God wrought! Take down your harps from the willows and sing; "This our sister was dead, and is alive again; was lost and is found."

That this was known through all Joppa, arose, partly from her former charities, which gave her the noblest celebrity, and partly

from the fact, that messengers had been sent to a distant town to bring Peter there; to say nothing of her return to that life of beneficence which God saw fit to honour by restoring her to usefulness; and, while she waited for her final bliss, made her more ripe and rich, by this unexpected delay. She must have been satisfied to return, even from the Paradise of the "spirits of the just made perfect;" for, by her restoration to life, "many believed on the Lord." What Christian would not part with some years of the intermediate state of bliss, to be the means of conferring on many the perfection of holiness and happiness, through eternity?" It so happened, that Peter remained "for some days at Joppa," not in the house of Dorcas but of Simon, a tanner, to reap the fruit of this miracle, in the conversion of its inhabitants to Christ.

What a rush of thoughts is produced by this triumph in bringing back Dorcas to life! You wish to question her about the world from which she has returned. But she is as silent as Lazarus was. Perhaps it was not fit that such persons should remember where they had been; and it would not be possible for us to understand what they would be expected to tell. We must die to know. But that Christ lives, and that he is the resurrection and the life, we know by this miraculous confirmation of the Gospel.

Sisters of Dorcas, go on with your work. Clothe the naked, feed the hungry, for "with such sacrifices God is well pleased." Let death find you thus employed; and if life be prolonged, let it be a blessing that you are kept out of heaven, for a while, to bring others into it.

We ask for no more miracles, except those which turn men's hearts to the Lord, and make selfish creatures benefactors to the world. "But I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."

But, now, what improvement should we make of this pair of wonders. For what are the laws of nature changed? Why is the paralytic, of eight years' suffering, cured in a moment? Why are the dead disturbed, by the recall of one of their number from that bourne whence we are accustomed to say, "No traveller

returns"? That "all who know it may turn to the Lord"; that "many may believe in the Lord." That such effects were produced we profess to admit. But are they not worthy to be repeated? Is not "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever?" Are we not as much in need of his salvation as those who turned and believed on him, when they saw, or heard, of Eneas and Dorcas? Must we not sicken and die? Have we any means of being prepared for the great change, but conversion to God, faith in the Lord Jesus? Are we not accountable to him for the use we make of the wonders which he anciently wrought, to prove himself worthy of our faith and love? Must we not, at the great tribunal, meet these monuments of Christ's power and goodness? And how shall we face them, if, professing to believe what is here recorded of them, we turn not to the Lord Jesus, nor yield ourselves to him who holdeth our souls in life, and will finally call us all back from the realms of death?

In this eleventh Lecture we have seen the last miracles of mercy wrought on the Jewish nation, in that land of wonders from which the Gospel is passing over to the Gentiles.

LECTURE XII.

THE GATHERING OF THE GENTILES INTO THE CHURCH, OR THE
THROWING DOWN OF THE MIDDLE WALL OF PARTITION.

ACTS x. 1—xi. 18.

“SING, O barren, thou that didst not bear: break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child; for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord.” This shout of the inspired prophet of the Jews was echoed back by the inspired apostle of the Gentiles, to the church of the Galatians. Re-echo it, Christians, through the world; for it proclaims, “peace on earth, goodwill among men,” since Christ “abolished in his death the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, to make in himself, of two, one new man, so making peace.” If “we, who were not Jews by nature, but sinners of the Gentiles,” have been so long in possession of the privileges of the church of God, unencumbered with the Mosaic law, that we think it quite natural we should thus enjoy them; we shall see by the sequel, that to the Jews it seemed scarcely possible we should ever thus be blessed. As my plan is to take up subjects, rather than a certain number of verses, I have, to-day, too large a field to be allowed to delay at the entrance, and, therefore, I proceed to consider the visions, the visits, and the effects, here recorded. The visions were twofold—the one to Cornelius,

the other to Peter ; the visits were two—one to Peter, the other to Cornelius ; and the effects were twofold—at first all joyous ; afterwards, various.

I. THE TWO VISIONS, WHICH WERE AFFORDED TO THE HEARER AND THE PREACHER, IN ORDER TO BRING THEM TOGETHER, occupy the first sixteen verses.

That both parties might be assured of the will of God, they were each favoured with a message from heaven, which, when they came to compare notes, compelled them to acknowledge, “This is the finger of God.”

1. *The angelic vision granted to Cornelius.* Chap. x. 1—8. He was residing at Cesarea, which was to the heathen Romans, who now ruled Judea, what Jerusalem was to the Jewish natives of the country—the capital, the seat of government, where was the theatre, the temple of their God ; for Herod, who built the city, and named it after Cæsar, had flattered the Romans, by sacrificing his own professed principles as a Jew. This beautiful place the conquerors preferred, as, lying on the sea-coast, it opened a more easy communication with Rome ; while Jerusalem was offensive to them, as, being the holy city of Israel, it was exclusively devoted to the worship of the true God. In Cesarea was the Prætorium, the palace of the military commander, under whom was Cornelius, whose name intimates that he was of the celebrated patrician or aristocratic family of the Cornelii. He was more than what we should call a captain in the army ; for Julian owns that he was an instance of a distinguished Roman early converted to Christ ; and his century, or hundred, whence he was termed a centurion, was called the band or company of Italy, because it was raised there, at the time when the Roman army was becoming barbarian.

He was one, among the many, who found the benefit of being brought into contact with the worshippers of the true God. For he was devout, or pious, not only fearing God himself, but having also a pious household, while he was exercising many charities to the people of the Jews, among whom he dwelt, and “was praying constantly to God.” “In his afternoon prayer, at three o’clock, which the Jews reckoned the ninth hour, he saw, so manifestly as to leave no doubt, an angel of God entering in to him, and saying, “Cornelius.” The intrusion into his secret

devotions, the unearthly splendour of the messenger, and the familiar or commanding tone in which he called the Roman by name,—all spoke one more than human, which, directing attention, created alarm in the lofty soldier, who feared not the face of man: but prophets and apostles have feared in the presence of “angels who excel in strength.” Yet, when he cried out, “What is it, my Lord?” he was calmed and fortified by the assurance, “Thy prayers and thine alms have ascended for a memorial before God.” Oh, to know this concerning ourselves! An angel from heaven could scarcely bring us better tidings.

Here, then, is a refutation of a world of mistakes concerning this man and this event. Call not this the conversion of Cornelius; if by that term you mean turning a man from sin to righteousness, and from the wrath to the favour of heaven. He is not only declared to have been a pious man who feared God, and a benefactor to his people, but God sent his angel to testify that the devotions and alms of the Roman were remembered before God. This is not the description of a sinner, but of a saint. “The prayers of the upright only, are God’s delight; while the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination.” This vision, which was a proof of God’s kindness to his accepted servant, was sent to bring one who had believed, amidst much darkness, to the full enjoyment of the light and liberty of the Gospel. But another strange mistake has been made, by adducing the case of Cornelius as a proof of the acceptance of some among the heathen who are worshipping idols, while Scripture declares that “no idolater has any inheritance in the kingdom of God.” What had Cornelius to do with idols? He worshipped the true God, whose angel testified that “his prayers and alms ascended as a memorial *before God*,” and not an idol. He had learned, either from the Jews, who abounded at Rome, or by coming into Judea, which, perhaps, was his own choice, for pious reasons, that there is no other God but that of Israel, and that “an idol is nothing in the world.” Find us another Cornelius among the heathen, and we will readily admit his acceptance and salvation.

But he had something to learn; as had even prophets and kings, who desired to see and hear what blessed the eyes and ears of apostles and disciples of Christ. The fulfilment of the ancient prophecy, by the coming of Christ, and the redemption wrought

by his death, were unknown to Cornelius, as they had been to the Ethiopian treasurer. The angel, therefore, said to the Centurion, "Now send men to Joppa, and fetch Simon, who is called Peter; for this person is a guest with one Simon, a tanner, who has a house by the sea." The business of tanning, which was usually carried on at the outside of towns, by rivers or the sea, was not considered respectable, as among us, and apostles were more frequently guests with the industrious than the illustrious. When the angel who had spoken to him went away, Cornelius promptly called two of his men-servants and a soldier, who, being devout, was chosen constantly to wait on him, as soldiers frequently did on their superior officer. A pious soldier! What a sight! But where there is a pious officer, an army may become a church! Cornelius related to these three all the affair, before he sent them to Joppa. The piety of his household was beautifully displayed in the confidential manner in which the master treated the servants, and his sincerity and prudence were as conspicuous, in securing witnesses to the truth of this angelic visit, if it should afterwards come abroad and be treated as an invention. Happy the master who is surrounded by Christian servants, whom he may treat as friends!

2. *The vision afforded to Peter.* Ver. 9—16. Cesarea being fifty miles, or what may be reckoned two days' journey, from Joppa, the messengers were, on the next evening, near the latter city, when Peter went up to the oratory, on the roof of Simon's house, to offer the noontide prayer, at what was called the sixth hour. Becoming very hungry, he wished to eat; and they were preparing for him food, doubtless thinking it extraordinary that in the house of a friend, the guest should need, or wish, food to be provided for him alone. During this time he fell into a trance, as we should say; but the original phrase is, an ecstasy fell on him, of which, as extraordinary, and even miraculous, we can have no knowledge. In this ecstatic state, when earth disappeared, he sees heaven opened and a "descending vessel," as our translation renders the Greek *σκεῦος*, which, in that language, means any part of the furniture of a house, including sheets, or carpets. "This appeared like a great sheet, or cloth, fastened at the four corners, as if by cords, to let it down upon the ground. In it were all the quadrupeds of the earth, and the wild beasts, and the reptiles, and the fowls

of heaven." Such an enumeration includes multitudes of creatures forbidden by the Mosaic law, as may be seen in Leviticus xi., which should be read in connexion with this chapter: "but a voice came, saying, Rise, Peter ; kill, and eat ;" alluding to his sudden hunger and desire for food. But he, seeing many things, which though used for food by other nations, were pronounced by the Jewish law unclean and abominable, seemed to think this a trial of his obedience, and replied, "By no means, Lord," regarding the voice as coming from heaven, where his Lord reigned ; and, appealing to him as witness, pleaded, "I have never eaten anything common or unclean." This declaration was of great use, to show that the abolition of the Mosaic ceremonies was not introduced by a loose and profligate Jew, to sanction his own contempt of the Divine law, but by one who had conscientiously observed it, when it was in force. The voice, which he had owned to be that of his Lord, replied, "What God hath purified, do not thou profane ;" if I may be allowed to use the word "profane," as signifying to abhor as profane. God is here declared to have rendered pure, or lawful, every creature good for food ; for all kinds were here shown to Peter, who knew that many of them had been forbidden as unclean and abominable. Paul, therefore, says, "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused." Peter is now charged not to set up his authority against that of God, by treating as common, or profane, any creature, after God had given them all to be eaten. This scene (with its dialogue?) was repeated, even to a third time, to make Peter certain of its truth and importance ; and then the sheet and its contents were taken up into heaven, whence it had descended ; leaving Peter to muse and debate within himself what the vision which he had seen might *be* ; for so it is expressed in the Greek, though our translators have well rendered it, what the vision might *mean*. Thus, where our Lord says, "Go and learn what that might *be*," we properly read, "what that meaneth." Other instances, also, show that, when we consider the sacramental words, "This is my body," as equivalent to, "This represents, or signifies, my body," we are not inventing a meaning for a verb, to serve a purpose ; but are adopting a sense sanctioned by Scripture ; which, in accordance with its Hebrew or Syriac origin, instead of the phrase, "*This signifies that*," employs "*This is that*." Peter knew

well what the vision was ; but he debated in himself what it signified, or meant. Turn we now to

II. THE VISITS HERE RECORDED.

These, like the visions, are twofold ; that of the messengers of Cornelius to Peter, and that of Peter to Cornelius.

1. *The visit of the messengers to Peter.* Ver. 17. While he was deliberating on the signification and design of the vision, the full import of which we must own was not obvious, the men sent from Cornelius, having inquired for the house of Simon, and been directed to the spot, stood at the gate, doubtless saying, "Here is the house by the sea side ;" "there is the tanyard." "Thus far, the vision proves true. Now, if we find such a person, a guest here, we may be sure that our Centurion has really been directed by an angel." They call, inquiring, "Is Simon, who is surnamed Peter, a guest here?" As Peter is still reflecting on the vision, the Spirit, whose voice and authority he well knew, said to him, "See, three men are seeking thee ; then, rise and go down, proceeding with them, nothing doubting ; for it is I that have sent them." We may not ask, Why did not the same Spirit reveal the whole affair to Peter at once ? For God gives no account of his ways to mortals ; though we may easily discern many advantages that resulted from leading Peter on, step by step.

He, descending to the men, said, "I am the person you are seeking. What is the cause for which you are come?" They related the affair, adding that Cornelius was well attested by the whole nation of the Jews, as having learned to worship their God, and to give alms to his people, which would be an inducement to Peter, as a Jew, to accept the invitation to the house of him who was, by an oracle, "through a holy angel, commanded to hear words, or a message, from thee." These were faithful messengers, who showed the piety which reigned in their master's house ; but as this seems to have passed at the gate, he invited them in, and entertained these servants as guests, who, doubtless, like Abraham's servant, adored the God who made their way prosperous, all things happening as the angel had said to Cornelius.

2. *The visit of Peter to Cornelius.* Ver. 28. "On the morrow, rising, he went forth, and some of the brethren who were from

Joppa, kindly went with him; that they who had heard the story of the messengers, might be his witnesses; for the propriety of Peter's conduct would be called in question. "The next day they entered into Cesarea, and Cornelius was expecting them, having called together his relations and nearest friends," in the exercise of that benevolence and holy courage by which he had already become a blessing to his household. Little credit is due to our religion; if it seeks not the salvation of all around. That Peter should, on his entrance, be met by Cornelius, in an ecstasy of reverence, falling at his feet and worshipping, seems surprising. Peter raised him, saying, "Stand up; I myself also am a man;" which intimates that the Centurion thought him more than a man. The apostle's reason for his refusal to receive the honours offered, proves that Christ, who allowed himself to be worshipped, was more than a man. Peter entered, conversing with him who had collected many, to benefit by this interview, and be his witnesses to its miraculous origin. Hear the apostolic sermon.

"You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to be connected, or to come in to a foreigner; but to me God has sent a vision, to induce me to come, and has shown me not to call any man profane, or unclean;" alluding to, if not describing, the vision, with the voice, "what God has purified, treat not thou as profane," which Peter now learned to apply, not only to articles of food, but also to those who ate them. The Spirit had shown the inference, when he said, "Go with these men, though Gentiles." "Therefore, also, without contradiction, I have come, being sent for, to a Roman family; and now I inquire for what reason you have sent for me?" This reason had been intimated by the messengers; but the apostle deemed it desirable to hear it from Cornelius himself, who related what we have already noticed. He closed thus: "Thou hast done well in coming; we, therefore, are all here present before God, to hear all that is commanded thee by God." A beautiful specimen of prompt, implicit obedience, which may put to shame many who have had far higher advantages. Oh, that when the worship of God commences, we could say, "*We are all here.*"

Peter opened his mouth, with a declaration calculated to win the affections, and inspire the hopes, of his audience: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but, in

every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him." On this grand truth has been heaped up many an error. Strange to tell, it has been hence inferred, that all religions, true or false, are equally acceptable to God, provided those who profess them are sincere. So, because the worshippers of an idol were sincere, when they cut themselves with knives, and cried, "O Baal, hear us!" they were to be reckoned among those who "feared God and wrought righteousness." If any can be found among the heathen, who answer the description of Cornelius, it is certain that they are accepted of God; but this is a question of fact, to be decided, in each individual case, according to evidence. With this, Cornelius, a convert to the worship of the true God, in the only country on earth where he was known, has nothing to do. Again: it has been supposed that this sentence proves that men are saved for their works of righteousness, in spite of the counter declaration of an apostle. As well might it be supposed, Christ and the Gospel are of no use; because Cornelius was accepted, before he knew what Peter came to tell. But the God of the Jews, whom Cornelius worshipped, had revealed himself in that temple, where a thousand sacrifices told of justification by the Lamb of God, who should take away the sin of the world; and vision after vision was sent, to make Cornelius know that the Lamb was slain. Once more; this sentence of Peter has been adduced against the election of grace. If that doctrine included any denial of God's accepting the man who fears him and works righteousness, it could not be true. But, on the contrary, election goes to the root of the matter, and declares that God chooses out of every nation those whom he inspires with his fear, and with the love of righteousness; and this work of his own hands cannot but be acceptable to him, wherever it is found. Peter perceiving this in Cornelius, a Roman, who had not been received into the Jewish church, but had been chosen and called, declared him accepted, as God had already ordered by his angel. As this is the most disputed passage in the New Testament, it may be asked, whether God really did send by Jesus Christ the message, that God is no respecter of persons, but receives the righteous, of whatever nation they may be? We answer, Yes. Samaritans, whom the Jews abhorred as unclean, are once and again exhibited, by our Lord, as more acceptable to God than

Jews. "They shall come from the east and west, and sit down with Abraham in the kingdom; and the children of the kingdom shall be cast out." A Roman is declared possessor of such faith as was not found in Israel. "The kingdom shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." We return to hear Peter.

"That message God sent to the sons of Israel, proclaiming, Peace, good news, by Jesus Christ. This is all nations, Lord." The best manuscripts have not the Greek *ὅτι*, and I consider Peter to assert, that God sent by Christ, who is Lord of all nations, the assurance, that as God never rejected one that wrought righteousness, whatever was his nation; so all nations are to be called to own Jesus Christ, Lord. Thus the apostle Paul tells the Ephesians, that "Jesus Christ came, making peace, by breaking down the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile."

"You yourselves know what happened through all Judæa; beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed; Jesus, who was from Nazareth,—how God anointed him with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went through the land, working beneficent acts, and healing all that were overcome by the devil; for God was with him." We find, therefore, that Cornelius and his friends, too, were acquainted with the history of our Lord; and it may be said, Why send heavenly visions to call Cornelius to the Christian faith, which he ought previously to have embraced? But a new convert to the God of the Jews, and, perhaps, a new comer, may not have deemed himself a judge in a question on which the nation was divided. Nor is it certain, or probable, that Cornelius ever saw our Lord, who had departed years before, or knew more of him than could be learned by public rumour, or by the representations of the rulers, with whom a man of his rank would associate. But the visions and the visits here recorded were in answer to prayer, and were a testimony that it was heard. Who, then, can doubt that Cornelius had been praying for light on this very subject, to know what he ought to think of the report which he had heard concerning Jesus of Nazareth; and that to this the angel referred, when he said, "Thy prayer is heard; send men to Joppa, and call for Peter, who shall tell thee all the truth which thou hast asked to know"? For "then shall ye know, if

ye follow on to know the Lord ; his going forth is prepared as the morning."

Peter now informs Cornelius of what he probably knew not ; "*We* are witnesses of all that Jesus did in the country of the Jews, and in Jerusalem." If we have not the whole that the speaker delivered, on this occasion ; he may have previously mentioned the choice of the twelve apostles, and their appointment to be Christ's witnesses, to which he referred, in saying, *we* are the persons ; but perhaps he anticipated that which he was about to say on this point. Having mentioned our Lord's actions in Jerusalem, the apostle adds, "Whom they even killed, having hung him on a tree, or cross. Him God raised up, the third day, and made him visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses before chosen by God ; to us, who ate and drank with him, after his rising from the dead." Mark the unimpassioned manner in which the crime of the Jews is mentioned, while the reproach of the cross is not concealed. To a Roman, to have been hung on a cross rendered a person to the last degree infamous. But Peter, not ashamed of its reproach, preaches Christ crucified ; as Paul declares he was not ashamed to do, even at Rome. The evidence which the apostles had of their Lord's resurrection, is stated with equal simplicity and force. Now follows the charge received : "He commanded us to proclaim to the people, who saw him not after he rose, and to bear witness that this is the Judge of the living and the dead, ordained by God. To this all the prophets bear witness, that all who believe on him receive remission of sins, through his name." Cornelius, having learned to worship the God of Israel, is supposed to know the Scriptures of the Prophets ; and now discovers that Jesus of Nazareth was the wondrous person of whom they spake, and through whom he had himself received forgiveness, ere yet he had discovered that the prophecies concerning him were fulfilled. You have now heard an apostolic sermon, all full of Christ, and closing with justification by faith, after citing the whole world to be judged at the bar of Christ. We turn to

III. THE EFFECTS OF THIS VISIT AND DISCOURSE. Ver. 44 to chap. xi. 18.

These effects were twofold ; all glorious in the house of Cornelius ; but various in the church at Jerusalem.

1. *In the house of Cornelius, glorious were the effects.* "For while Peter was speaking these things the Holy Spirit fell on all that were hearing the word." This must not be understood of the spirit of conversion; for Cornelius had already been declared righteous and accepted of God; his household, too, had been pronounced pious; the soldier, who waited on him, was also a devout man; and the relatives who were called together by the Centurion were, probably, of the same character; but the descent of the Spirit was like that which came upon the apostles and church at Pentecost; and in Samaria, after Philip had baptized those who believed. "For the believers of the circumcision, who had come with Peter, were astonished, that even on the Gentiles was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost; for they heard them speaking with tongues and magnifying God." The pouring out of the Spirit, therefore, means, not that operation which changes the heart, but cannot be known immediately by man; but that gift which enabled these Gentiles to speak in languages which they had never learned, and to magnify God, as did the apostles at Jerusalem; when men of all nations said, "Are not all these Galileans? How hear we them, then, speaking in our tongues, the wonderful works of God?"

But here the wonder is enhanced; that men, yet uncircumcised and therefore reckoned among Gentiles, not received into the Jewish church, not conforming to its rites, were endued with those miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, which testified their equality with the most favoured members of the church of God. Hitherto the Grecians, whose murmurs led to the appointment of deacons, the Samaritans whom Philip gathered into the church, and the Ethiopian treasurer, were proselytes to the Jewish religion, and it is a mistake to suppose that the apostles did not anticipate or welcome the reception of all nations into the Christian church. But though their Lord had taught them to look and labour for this, they supposed that men of other nations must become Jews, by circumcision and conformity to the Mosaic law, and then be received into the Christian church. Christ had not seen fit to inform the apostles of the abolition of the ceremonial law.

But now Peter asks, "Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost even as we?" I think Peter refers to their having received the

gift of tongues, as the apostles themselves, at Pentecost; and asks whether any one could doubt of their being admitted, by God, into all the privileges of Christians, even the most honoured? Can we, then, refuse to admit them into our number? What can the phrase to "forbid the water" mean, but to forbid the water to be brought? In baptism by affusion, we bring the water to the person; but immersion would lead to ask, if any could forbid the person to be brought to the water. It is observable that Peter is not said to have baptized them, but to have commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord, *i. e.*, by his authority and in submission to his command, "Baptize them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Those who came with Peter are termed merely brethren, and there is not the least reason to suppose they were ministers; for none were yet appointed. They were, however, commanded to baptize; as, in the earliest church, the Christian who won a convert baptized him. As to regeneration by clerical baptism, this history not only smites it as a heresy, but exhibits a man righteous and accepted of God, and even endued with the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, before he was baptized at all! Even the gift of the Holy Ghost was, in this instance, not conferred by the laying on of the apostles' hands.

The grand lesson taught here, is the abolition of circumcision, and the substitution of baptism in its place; with the abrogation of the whole Jewish law, "which consisted in meats and drinks, and carnal ordinances, ordained till the time of reformation," which had now arrived. They who had been thus received into the Christian church, by baptism, without circumcision, invited Peter to remain some days, which he could not have done, without departing, for the first time in his life, from the Jewish ritual, as everything in the house and at the table of a Gentile, would have been unclean to him, had he not learned that, "what God has cleansed, or made pure, that should no man profane, or treat as unclean." This leads to

2. *The effect on the church at Jerusalem.* Chap. xi. 18. "The apostles and brethren that were through all Judæa, heard that even the Gentiles had received the word of God," which, occurring at Cesarea, the seat of the Roman government, would soon spread through the country. When, therefore, Peter, quitting the house of Cornelius, returned to Jerusalem, some disciples of

the circumcision contended with him, avoiding the question about the new converts, and charging *him* with violating his duty, as a Jew, by entering into the family of the uncircumcised, and eating with them. He meekly replied, by unfolding the whole affair, from the first, as we have viewed it. Ver. 5—15. We are told that Peter said, “These *six* brethren accompanied me; and that the angel said to Cornelius, Peter “shall speak to thee words by which thou shalt be saved, and *all thy house*,” which we were not told before, but is of great importance when circumcision was superseded by baptism; for it shows that the blessing of Abraham came upon the Gentiles, whose household, like that of Abraham, were to be blessed along with the parents. Another addition is made to our knowledge. Peter says, “The Holy Ghost fell on them as on us, at the beginning, *i.e.*, at Pentecost; then remembered I the word of the Lord, John, indeed, baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.” If the falling of water upon the person is not baptism, but the person must fall into the water; how could the falling of the Holy Ghost upon those persons remind the apostle of baptism at all? If the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on men, is baptizing them with the Spirit; the pouring out of water upon them, is baptizing them with water.

Peter now defends himself, by saying, “If, therefore, God gave to them the like gift, as even to us who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I? able to withstand or hinder him from placing these Gentiles on a level with us?” God’s acceptance of men is said to be sealed by the gift of the Spirit, and this is pronounced a claim on our acceptance. The whole of the mother church, therefore, though consisting of circumcised persons, submitted in peace, and even glorified God for that which they had before opposed, saying, “Then has God to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.” For they knew that God did not grant his Spirit to the impenitent; but the miraculous were signs of the gracious operations. Thus Peter’s conduct in eating with them, which had been censured, was justified, proving the abolition of the law of ceremonies; since Christians must eat and drink together, and not treat each other as unclean. From this time, Peter began that course which Paul blamed him for interrupting, on one occasion: “Thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews.”

This history, therefore, is not that of the conversion of sinners to righteousness, but that of the reception into the Christian church of converted Gentiles, without passing through the rites, or becoming members of the Jewish church.

The effusion of the Spirit was not for the production of religion, but for the attestation of God's previous favour and acceptance, to prove, by gifts of a miraculous kind, the claim of the persons to Christian fellowship.

This was the breaking down of the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, to make of the two one church, "revealing the mystery that had been hidden for ages, that the Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs with the Jews."

The objection made to the infallibility of the apostles is invalid ; for they never doubted the calling of the Gentiles, whose reception God had reserved to this time ; and, to show, what was not before revealed, that the Mosaic law was abolished, Christ employed his apostle, and honoured him with visions, not suffering an angel to do the work for which Cornelius was to fetch Peter, and he was to be induced to go.

Here we find Christ's promise fulfilled. Peter, who had employed the first key to open the kingdom to the Jews at Pentecost, now turns the second key to open the door of faith to the Gentiles ; so true is our Lord to his word : "I give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." What the apostles bound on earth, the law of faith, that a man must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to be saved, was bound in heaven ; but what they loosed, the ceremonial law, was loosed in heaven. "We must be justified by faith in Christ, without works of law."

Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, had now been called ; but Peter, to whom our Lord first committed the keys, is employed to commence the work in Judæa, which Paul was afterwards to carry on through the world. For salvation is of the Jews, in various ways ; and the apostle of the circumcision introduces the Gentiles to be fellow-citizens with the saints, and "of the household of God."

But mark his humility. How remote from the arrogance of those who pretend to be his successors, and suffer men to kiss their feet ! though Peter said, "Stand up, I myself am a man." Would you have thought it possible that the Pope's persecuting sword should have been defended by appealing to the command,

“ Rise, Peter ; kill and eat ” ? Are persecutors to be cannibals, and eat what they kill ?

But mark how the pretended successors of the apostles have departed from their example and their doctrine ; for, while Peter preached Christ, and remission of sins by faith in his name, pronouncing those accepted of God who feared him, though neither circumcised according to the ancient church, nor baptized by the rite of the new ; those who boast their apostolicity, attach forgiveness and acceptance to rites and forms, in opposition to justification by faith. Peter ordered them to be baptized, because they had received the Holy Ghost, and were accepted.

Let us, however, remember that the apostle cites us all to the judgment-seat of Christ, who gives visibility, I had almost said tangibility, to the great Assize, by appearing in our nature, as Judge of quick and dead. How, then, shall we escape, if we neglect the great salvation ? Beware lest this Roman soldier, educated in the worship of idols, rise up in the judgment and condemn you !

But rejoice that God has granted to Gentiles repentance unto life, without putting their necks under the law of the Jews, which neither they nor their fathers could bear. The Jewish law never was intended to be universal, or perpetual. It was fitted only to a small nation, for a time. It was never given to any but the seed of Abraham, nor to them, before they settled in Canaan. When the kingdom of God is universal, the ceremonies of Moses are impossible. Peter, a Jew, may eat with the Gentiles, for they are all one in Christ Jesus. Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free. Rejoice, not that you may eat ham, rabbits, and hares ; but that your conscience is freed from a yoke of bondage.

“ Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving of them that believe and know the truth, for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. But now that the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile is thrown down, the enmity is abolished, and we are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Our twelfth march is a joyous one for us Gentiles ; as it brings us to the full inheritance of the saints, in the household of faith.

LECTURE XIII.

THE ORIGIN OF THE CHRISTIAN NAME.

Acts xi. 19 to the end.

THE Christian name! Let no one scornfully ask, "What is there in a name?" For if, in one sense, names are nothing, and wise men regard only things; in another, it is justly said, "The world is ruled by names." Nay, more; the church is taught, by infinite wisdom, to attach high importance to names, when Jehovah says to Israel, "Fear this glorious, fearful name, Jehovah, thy God;" and when we are assured, that, because our Saviour humbled himself, "and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, therefore has God highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." Since, therefore, a name has been given us, to express our relation to Christ; all ye that glory in him, see how you came by it, and how you should wear it; that you may not "cause the enemy to blaspheme the worthy name by which you are called." I would now direct your attention to—

I. THE ARRIVAL OF OUR RELIGION AT THE BIRTHPLACE OF ITS NAME.

If Judæa, called by the prophet, Immanuel's land, was the cradle of the Christian faith; a Gentile city gave birth to its name. Two steps of providence led to this event.

1. *The first and more remote step, was that dispersion of the church, which produced an extension of the faith among the Jews.* “They who were dispersed by the affliction which happened after Stephen bled, went through the country, as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch;” which would be paralleled by our saying, that they who were driven from London, went as far as Portsmouth, and the Isle of Wight, and Plymouth. For I see no reason to think that the place called Phenice, in Crete, mentioned in Acts. xxiii. 12, was here intended; since Phenice, around Tyre and Sidon, was the extremity of the Holy Land, from Jerusalem; and the Isle of Cyprus lay embedded in a projecting turn which the land takes about Antioch, the principal place whither they would go, who, instead of crossing over to the island, kept along the coast. But these dispersed believers were not like those who, leaving their religion with their home, show that they have their religion to seek; for, though exiled, and treated as outlaws, for Christ’s sake, his disciples loved him not the less for that, but thought that others would be the happier for becoming, as they were, “companions of the kingdom and patience and tribulation of Christ.” They went, “speaking the word;” as we find, from the earliest history, both inspired and uninspired, all believers did, without any suspicion that this was the exclusive duty and right of those who were in office. To doom a zealous disciple to silence, is to bid him “hide the ointment which bewrayeth itself by its volatile fragrance.” But as the dispersed had fled, before the “mystery was made known, that the Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs;” these, who would now be called laymen, spoke the word to none but the Jews,—supposing that all must first become Jews by proselytism, and through that door pass into the Christian church. Thus was fulfilled the duty which Paul acknowledged to the Jews: “It was necessary that the word should first be preached to you;” to which Peter also referred, saying, “You are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers; to you, first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you.” We are not informed of any success; for the cloud of glory was, after the martyrdom of Stephen, passing from the Jews to us Gentiles, of whom we are now to hear glorious things. “The kingdom of God shall be taken from the Jews,” said Christ, “and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”

2. *The second, and more immediate step, brought the Gospel to the Gentiles.* “Some of the exiles being men of Cyprus and Cyrene,” Gentile countries, where Jews abounded, on coming to Antioch, instead of confining themselves to the seed of Abraham, “spoke to the Greeks of the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus.” Misled by an incorrect reading, many have supposed these new hearers were of the class called Hellenists, in Acts vi. 1; that is to say, Gentiles proselyted to the Jews’ religion. But Griesbach and Scholz adopt the better reading, Ἕλληνας, Greeks; and the connexion proves that they were *mere* Gentiles. This constitutes all the difference between the occurrence mentioned in this verse, and that which is recorded in the preceding. For, they who spoke to the Jews only, were never inclined, and not always able, to distinguish the Jews by birth from those by proselytism. To me, it is surprising that any should have supposed that this twentieth verse records, in this formal manner, the preaching of the Gospel to such persons as are called Grecians, or Hellenists, who murmured against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected, who were some of the most important elements of the first Christian church; while this verse introduces a new class of hearers—Greeks, or Gentiles. But God had just shown, by pouring out his Spirit on Cornelius and his friends, who had not conformed to the Jewish rites, that he received into his church Gentiles, direct, without proselytism, without passing through the Jewish church; and now he led his servants a step further, by calling those who had not even learned, like Cornelius, to worship the God of the Jews. “Jews and Greeks” are mentioned as equivalent to Jews and Gentiles, the two classes into which the world was divided. This verse records the calling of Greeks, or mere Gentiles. To these it was *news* indeed, to hear of the Lord Jesus; for they were unacquainted with the whole history of his person and work; and it was *good* news to be informed that he had commanded the glad tidings of repentance and remission of sins to be preached, in his name, among all nations, though accompanied with the injunction, “beginning at Jerusalem.” The preachers, and the place, both contributed to break down the middle wall of distinction and of prejudice, which had hitherto shut out the Gentiles. They who were natives of Cyprus, a heathen isle; and they who were from Cyrene, a Roman colony,

on the opposite coast of Africa, had become familiar, and perhaps friendly, with Gentiles, by long intercourse; and they now found themselves amidst myriads of them, at Antioch, the capital of Syria, and a Greek city, founded by Antiochus, one of Alexander's successors. To stand amidst the crowds of this polished, but idolatrous city, and say nothing concerning their Saviour, was impossible to men of ardent zeal; and therefore they gave vent to their Christian philanthropy, without knowing how God had already "opened the door of faith to the Gentiles," at Cesarea. Perhaps they intended to make the Antiochians proselytes to Moses, as an introduction to the school of Christ.

"But the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number, having believed, turned to the Lord," which set the question at rest. For the preachers found that they had done what God approved, the Lord working with them, and instead of making the Greeks to become Jews, had at once rendered them Christians; which, perhaps, was contrasted with the want of success attendant on those who had spoken to none but the Jews. We have a volume of instruction in these few words. The hand of the Lord Jesus is mentioned, as that of Jehovah in the Old Testament, where the right hand of the Lord is said to do valiantly; so that the righteous man exclaims, "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." The omnipotence of God is represented as a hand that reaches from heaven to earth; and, while the preachers addressed the ear, the hand of the Lord was with them, touching the heart, and producing effects which elicited the ancient exclamation, "This is the finger of God!" For where "the Gospel is preached, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven," it appears to him who discovers his sin and danger, as if the red right hand of justice brandished the flaming sword, exclaiming, "Pay me that thou owest." But when the broken heart is to be healed, the hand of the Lord seems to be laid upon the throbbing bosom, to calm it down, with the attendant words: "Son, daughter, thy sins are forgiven thee."

Thus the Greeks were brought to believe the testimony they heard. Not that our faith is the effect of mere physical force; but the hand of the Lord disperses the darkness of the mind, and conquers the alienation of the heart; so that the truth is seen in its own convincing light, and a man then seems as naturally and spontaneously to believe what he sees to be a divine

testimony, as he before rejected and hated what he called error or deceit.

They who believed turned to the Lord, as the needle turns to the pole; though they were before turned away, with alienation of heart, as the pointer of the compass is shaken to any other quarter by the convulsions of a storm. Thus Paul reminds the Thessalonians "how they turned to God from idols;" and thus was "the right hand of the Lord exalted." Nor is there any saving effect produced by the Gospel, in the present day, except when the hand of the Lord is with us; for, as the heart of man yields to no other power, so all our hope lies in the assurance that "the Lord's arm is not shortened that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear." But when a great number of those who had been immersed in abominable idolatries believed and turned to God, "see that thou magnify his work, which men do behold." "Oh, sing unto the Lord! for he hath done marvellous things; his right hand and his holy arm hath gotten him the victory. The Lord hath made known his salvation; his righteousness hath he openly showed in the sight of the heathen."

II. THE EVENTS WHICH GAVE OCCASION AND CURRENCY TO THE CHRISTIAN NAME.

The disciples at Antioch must have been embarrassed, by an event parallel to that which occasioned disputes, even against Peter, in the parent church at Jerusalem; and those who won the Greeks may have doubted how they should act towards them. But the Lord, who watched over his church in these new and auspicious circumstances, provided for its guidance.

1. *By the visit of Barnabas.* Ver. 22—24. Till the apostles quitted Jerusalem, *there* was the seat of council and the centre of information; and the news being brought thither, that at Antioch the very Gentiles had heard and believed the joyful sound of salvation, the church sent forth Barnabas, "*to go as far as Antioch,*" beyond the pale that had hitherto limited their labours. The church had already learned and owned, that "God to the Gentiles granted repentance to life," and was prepared to impart and establish this conviction, where God had done even more than at Cesarea, to abolish the distinction between Gentile and Jew. Barnabas may have been chosen for his excellent

dispositions ; but, perhaps, also, for his Levitical birth, which would be a security to the Jews, that no indifference to the ancient dispensation was the spring of this movement towards a coalescence of all nations in one church. He came, he saw, he rejoiced, he assisted, he increased the "gathering of the nations to Shiloh."

His seeing the grace of God is often applied to his discernment of the influence of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of the Gentile believers ; but I think the design of the historian is to express what the Syriac terms the benevolence of God towards them, which was rendered manifest, indeed, by their religious character ; but the divine benevolence, the pure grace of heaven, or the free unmerited favour, which *produces* what we call the grace of God in the heart, was that which Barnabas saw and enjoyed. For the Jews thought that divine favour shown to Gentiles was children's bread cast to dogs ; but Barnabas saw, with no evil eye, that God had shown sovereign favour, pure grace, to the Gentiles ; and the man that introduced the newly-converted apostle of the Gentiles to the communion and confidence of the church, at Jerusalem, rejoiced over the first-fruits of them that, in Antioch, had long slept the sleep of death.

He exhorted them all, according to the import of his name, Barnabas, Son of Exhortation, "to adhere with purpose of heart to the Lord." For if the sight of a young convert is, to an elder disciple, joyous as that of her first babe to a mother ; the pleasure is mingled with anxieties for the future history of the newly-born thing, the perseverance which shall make the end crown the whole. To this continuance in the faith, purpose of heart eminently contributes, and is even almost identical with it. For he that sees the glory of the Lord, so as to purpose from his heart to cleave to him for ever, shows that sincerity of which perseverance is but the development and the proof. He that cleaves not to the Lord, never really purposed to do it ; but where grace produces the determination, glory crowns it.

The benevolent joy of this Christian Levite over the Gentile converts, and his exhortation to endure to the end, that they might be saved, is accounted for, by saying, "He was a good man," in the sense in which Paul declares a man would dare to die for such an one, though not for a righteous man. The kindness of Barnabas, displayed on various occasions,

rendered him eminently fit for the service on which he was sent to Antioch, where different, and formerly discordant, elements were "to make, of two, one new man, so making peace."

"As he was full of the Holy Ghost and of faith, a considerable multitude," we might say a crowd, "was joined to the Lord." For Peter reminds us that God made choice by whose mouth the Gentiles should hear and believe; and he forms the instrument for the destined usefulness. A preacher, who is himself a good man, yearning for men's salvation, full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith in the word he preaches, and in the God whose testimony he delivers, is usually crowned with success. A great number had already believed, before Barnabas came; but now a new host said, "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord, in an everlasting covenant." The benevolence that rejoiced over other men's labours was rewarded by the success of his own. This will be still further seen, in

2. *The visit of Saul.* Ver. 25, 26. "Then went forth Barnabas to Tarsus, to seek up Saul," whose departure to his native city we have noticed. Here, among his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh, for whose salvation he yearned, he was found by the man who first gave him the right hand of fellowship at Jerusalem, and who may be now presumed to say, "Brother Saul, the Lord who called thee, with the special declaration, 'To the Gentiles I now send thee,' is working wonders of grace among the Greeks, at Antioch. Come away to thy proper field, and gather a harvest peculiarly thine own."

"He brought him to Antioch, and they were a whole year assembled in the church, and teaching a considerable congregation." Here were two most distinguished teachers; but to those who know the state of the Gentiles, how full the Greeks were of false philosophy and idolatrous theogony, of the pollutions of idols, and of ignorant prejudices, it is unnecessary to say, that frequent meetings, and most laborious instructions by the ablest men, were required in a church recently formed of such elements. It is delightful to think that there were crowds attendant, for a whole year, on such an apostle as Paul, and such an apostolic man as Barnabas, who, far from envying his superior, not unwillingly introduced into the field of labour one who would eclipse him, and give occasion to repeat the Baptist's words, "He must

increase, but I must decrease." Let Barnabas be eclipsed, if Christ be but glorified.

Tillemont, that most respectable Romanist, enters credulously into the story of Peter's coming to Antioch, and founding the Christian church there, of which Luke says not one word. Save me from my friends! Tillemont does but remind us *that Peter did not found* the church at Antioch. Paul was the apostle brought there, not to lay the foundation, but to build it up.

3. *The result of these large accessions was the name of Christian.* But if this was the first time they were called Christian, had they not existed for ten years, and were they not spread over Judea and the lands adjoining? What, then, were they called before? For they must have had some name; and as it was not Christian, what was it? Among themselves there was no one name *exclusively* employed, but a list of appellations. They called each other disciples, to intimate that they learned of Christ as their master; believers, or the faithful, to speak their belief of all that Christ had said, and their faithful adherence to the truth; saints, or holy persons, to declare their separation from the world and sin; brethren, to express their fraternal relation and affection; to which the people called Quakers add the word "friend," and certainly *φίλοι*, which we render "beloved," is the usual Greek word for "friends."

If, then, these were the appellations employed by themselves, who gave them this new name of Christian? Not the Jews, we may be sure; for, as it speaks our relation to Christ, which is the Greek for Messiah, the Jews would not, by such a term, seem to admit that our Jesus was the Messiah. Nor can we find that the Jews ever did call us Christians, but, formerly, Nazarenes, or Galileans; as Tertullus says of Paul, "We found this man a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes;" and Julian, adopting the language of their enemies, called them Galileans. The Talmud employs the term Nazarenes, and the Jews, in their private intercourse among themselves, call us Goyim nations, or heathens. Nassari is the Arab, or Mahomedan, name for a believer in Jesus.

But it has been rather hastily concluded that they who had formerly adopted the various appellations which we have enumerated, now, for the first time, *gave themselves* the name of Christian at Antioch; and *that*, by divine direction. Why depart

from their former practice? As to the divine direction, that is merely inferred from the Greek verb *χορηγίζω*, here employed, which sometimes signifies, indeed, the answer of an oracle; but it also expresses merely the giving of a name. The verb is derived from business, or profitable employment; which frequently gave to a man his name, as we read of Simon, the Tanner; and a large proportion of our surnames speak this origin, as Mr. Carpenter, Fisher, Baker, Butler.

But what, if I can show that the disciples of Christ no more called themselves Christians, after this event at Antioch, than before? The word Christian occurs but three times in the New Testament, *i. e.*, in the passage before us; in the twenty-sixth chapter of this book, verse 28, where Agrippa says to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian;" but as Agrippa was not one, this proves nothing concerning the practice of Christians; though the third and last instance may be supposed to show that an *apostle* adopted the new appellation. Yet if you examine the connexion, you will find that Peter had just said, "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye. Let no man suffer as a thief or evil-doer, but if any suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed." The language, not of Christians concerning themselves, but of others, who reproached them, is in the apostle's view; as if he said, "Let them not call you thief, *murderer*, evil-doer; but if they reproach you for the name of Christ, calling you Christian, be not ashamed of that, but glorify God on this account." 1 Peter iv. 16.

There is, then, not one clear case of the name Christian being employed by the Saviour or his apostles, or by the earliest disciples, concerning themselves. There is not one epistle addressed to the Christian church, though all the apostolic letters were written after this appellation was adopted at Antioch. On the contrary, the same terms are employed, afterwards, as were in use before; for, to the end of the New Testament, we are called disciples, believers, saints, brethren; the church of God, or of Christ; but never Christians. I do not observe the word in the Epistle of Clemens Romanus to the Corinthians; though it abounds in the Epistle to Diognetus, which is without date, and anonymous, though ascribed to Justin Martyr.

If, then, this name was not assumed by Christians, nor imposed by the Jews, there remains but this one hypothesis, that it was

given them by the inhabitants of Antioch, the Gentile world around them. The language of Luke rather intimates this; for, instead of saying, as he might, and as I cannot but think he would have done, if the ordinary hypothesis were true, *that the disciples called themselves Christians* first at Antioch; he says, "They were called so there, as if it were by the inhabitants of that place." That this was the fact, many things prove. The name was given them in a Syro-Greek city, which, it should be observed, was the seat of the Roman government of Syria and Judea. The Antiochians felt the need of some term by which to call the new and numerous religionists who had risen up among them; as the world will always need some name for us. They could not call them Jews; for it was manifest that this was a new sect, differing from the Jews, who had long been known in Antioch, where they abounded. If it be asked, Why could they not have called us by the appellations formerly in use? I answer; if this means "in use among the Jews," the terms Nazarenes, Galileans, refer to a minute locality, the supposed birth-place of Christ, of which the Gentiles knew little; and the reproach conveyed by the terms was not intended by those who gave us this new name. But, if the question is, Why not employ the appellations adopted among Christians? I answer; these, in the first place, could not be supposed to be familiar to others; and, in the second, could not be expected to be adopted by them, as that would imply that they identified themselves with us, by calling us disciples, believers, saints, brethren, beloved, or friends. It is not to be expected, nor even desired, that the world should adopt our language, by which we are known among each other. Why should they make false professions? If, then, some term was needed to designate us, by those who did not intend to affiliate themselves with us, what should it be? The inhabitants of Antioch soon discovered that the disciples spoke much of Christ, and by adopting the term Christians, they designated us, as Christ's men; for they seem to have intended no scorn, or reproach. If the verb employed by Luke expresses anything peculiar, or instructive, as it is derived from business, it may be intended to express that Christians made Christ and his affairs, or kingdom, the business of their lives. It may be asked, Why did they not derive the name from Jesus, as well as, or instead of, Christ? I will not reply, with an eccentric preacher, that God did not choose his people should be called

Jesuits, which some, in latter days, almost substituted for Christian; but I rather remind you, that Jesus was a common name among the Jews, and would, therefore, not have been sufficiently distinctive; while Christ was a name of office, and signified that great deliverer, Messiah, whom we think to have come; and whom the Antiochians may have known the Jews expected. For other considerations on the name, I refer the reader to Dr. Dobbin's able and useful "*Tentamen Anti-Straussianum*." For, as we find that this name became current; so God foresaw it, and intended to suffer us to be called by that name in the world; though we cannot infer from thence, that we should do more than suffer it. I know, indeed, that some have supposed this was the fulfilment of a prophecy of Isaiah, to which the marginal reference in our Bibles has attached the present text. Acts xi. 26. "The Lord God shall slay you, and call his servants by another name;" but as I cannot find that God ever called his people by the name of Christians, I doubt the applicability of the prophecy to this event. It is certain, however, that this name immediately became current in the world; as we find Agrippa saying, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian;" and Peter supposes that those to whom he writes may suffer under the name of a Christian. This was the name by which the Roman historians called us, from the earliest mention of our affairs, even when they mistook its import, supposing that *chrestos* (*χρηστος*), mild, or kind, was the origin of the word, as they were unacquainted with the appellation, Christ. Hence, when calamities occurred in the empire, the cry of the populace was, "*Christiani ad leones*," (the Christians to the lions); and for a man to say, I am a Christian, was equivalent to saying, "I am ready to die."

This early currency of the name may be ascribed to the spot where it was first adopted. Antioch was the third city of the vast Roman empire; for, next to Rome, was Alexandria, and after this, Antioch was most celebrated. Situated at the embouchure of the river Orontes, at the opening into the plains of Syria, of which it was the capital, it contained, at one time, within a wall of twelve miles, eight hundred thousand inhabitants. It derived its name from its founder Antiochus, one of Alexander's generals, and abounded in all the literature and all the idolatry of the heathen world. The favourite abode of emperors and philosophers, its inhabitants were celebrated for their wit, and maintained

a literary controversy with Julian, who returned their lampoons on this philosopher's beard, which he wore, by a work entitled the "Misopogon," or Beard-Hater. The name Christian, devised and imposed in such a city, quickly spread over the Roman empire, as the word has a Latin rather than a Greek form; and though we find it first in a Greek document, it was given where Romans reigned. It is highly improbable that a church of recent converts in a Gentile city, should have themselves chosen to give a name to their religion, which had existed, for some years, and was spread over other countries. Did it not belong rather to the mother church at Jerusalem, to give a name to her sons?

But as the members of the churches never ceased to call each other disciples, brethren, believers, saints; so neither should we. For these appellations, more certainly were of Divine origin, express more clearly what we ought to be, and warn us not to go by a false name. If others call us Christians, let us not blush; for, though they may design to reproach us, for bearing the name of Christ; we should glory in suffering shame for his name's sake. If they merely intend, by this name, to distinguish us from other men, we should have no objection to be thus marked, as a peculiar people, called out of the world, to show forth Christ's praise. The world must have its own way of calling us. Let it.

4. *The works which did honour to the name originated in the place of its birth.* "For in those days descended prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch." The parent church, having learned that in a city so important, the Gospel was triumphing among the Gentiles, sent forth some of those members who were distinguished by miraculous gifts, which might confirm and increase the faith of the new converts. One of these, who was named Agabus, rising in the assembly, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, intimated that a great famine was just about to come upon the whole world, or realm, a phrase used very variously, and here employed, as it seems, to express the Roman empire, various parts of which were visited with famine. Josephus mentions one in Judea, at this time; for it happened under the emperor Claudius, who was terrified by a starving man throwing a crust at him. According as the disciples were prosperous in circumstances, they each determined to send contributions for the ministering to the saints, who were become

their brethren, dwelling in Judea. This intimates that Judea, and not Antioch, was the place affected by the famine; and proves that the brethren of the circumcision, having sent their gifted members to aid the new church of the Gentiles; these, in their turn, sent, as to suffering brethren, temporal aid. "Their debtors they were; for if the Gentiles were partakers of their spiritual blessings, it was their duty to administer to them of their carnal things." Thus Christians, in every land, were seen to be brothers; and, thus early, faith wrought by love, and grace produced golden fruits.

When it is said, "they did as they had determined, sending the contributions to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul;" this first use of the term "elders," in the Christian church, may well claim special attention. For what were usually called elders, by office, were not yet appointed, as that event is recorded in Acts xiv. 23. But the word presbyter, or elder, is very variously employed by the Greek writers; and, in the New Testament, it frequently signifies one who had been a long time in the Christian church; in which sense an apostle is called "an elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ." From this class, Matthias, the substitute for Judas, was chosen; and the deacons and bishops were, as far as possible, taken from these ranks. As the first deacons were soon called away; Stephen, by martyrdom, and Philip, by preaching; there were, perhaps, but few left at Jerusalem, which induced the Antiochian converts to send their contributions to the senior class of disciples, out of whom would be chosen those who took the care of the poor. That they sent by the hand of Barnabas and Saul, is one of the many proofs, that even after the election of deacons, the apostles frequently took the administration of pecuniary affairs, and of the relief of the poor. The apostle of the Gentiles, by conveying this first-fruit of the fraternal charity of the converted Greeks, towards the brethren in Judea, gave proof that his mission to the heathen had not cooled his attachment to his brethren, his kinsmen after the flesh; as he argued, on his trial, that he could not be an enemy; since he, but "a few days ago, came to bring alms to his nation and offerings."

And now the disciples of the Lord, at first called out from the seed of Abraham, are gathered from among the Gentiles, in such numbers that they have acquired a name by which they

may be known in the world. Why could men find no other name for us than Christians? Was it that they perceived that, among us, "Christ is all in all"? We own it, and will not refuse the name. Was it that they saw we were Christ's men, his property, his disciples, his imitators, his servants? We consent to be thus called, and only pray that we may not prove this to be a misnomer.

But why was Christ, rather than Jesus, chosen to give us a name? Christ, signifies the ANOINTED; not with material oil, but with the Holy Ghost; and Christians "have an unction from the Holy One," on whom the Spirit descended, and went down to all his members; for "no one calls Jesus, Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." It is true, the world knew not this mystery, when it gave us the name of Christians; but He who suffered it to cleave to us, and become both lasting and universal, knew it; and thus reminds us, that Christ's redemption becomes personally effective, on being applied by his own Spirit to the heart. If we are "sensual, not having the Spirit," we are no Christians.

That any other name than that of Christians should ever have been known among us, has been the theme of much eloquent lamentation, with which I cannot sympathise, while I see that believers did not take it to themselves; and that a list of other appellations, to the exclusion of Christian, is employed by the apostles. That we should have split into parties, by error and sin is, indeed, much to be deplored; but chiefly on account of the alienation of heart which these distinctions either imply, or produce, among those who should be all one in Christ Jesus. "Is Christ divided?" an apostle asks, when one said, "I am of Paul; and another, I of Apollos." To call ourselves by the name of Calvin, or Luther, or to say anything else than, "I am Christ's," is scarcely less than a sin; and what else is it, to call ourselves by the name of a locality, as the Greek church, the church of Rome, the church of Scotland, the church of England? "I am of the church of Christ," is the language of a Christian.

"One is our Master, even Christ;" not Luther, or Calvin; and Christ is Lord of all Christians, in whatever land they may dwell. If we are called by the name of Christian, let us remember that it connects us with Christ, and no other. On

him the whole body of the faithful hang, as the whole swarm on the queen bee ; and to turn from him, to receive our faith from another oracle, is to renounce the name of the whole for that of a sect, or section, instead of the head, from whom the whole body derives its unity.

We have observed, that the peculiar word which the inspired historian here employs for *calling* us by a name, is derived from *business*, as names were given to express the occupations of men, or the affairs in which they spent their lives ; and it is not improbable, that the Antiochians, who were celebrated for their shrewdness, intended to call us, men who made the service of Christ the business of their lives. We accept the omen ; we own the obligation ; “ to us, to live is Christ ; for none of us liveth to himself.” Men of Antioch, you saw what the first converts to Christ were ; oh, that your city could exhibit such now !

But where are the Christians ? It is recorded in the life of the celebrated John Wesley, that, having heard of the Moravian brethren as models of primitive Christianity, he went to see their settlement of Hernhut ; and being questioned on the way, concerning his errand, he excited the surprise of the local authorities, by saying, “ I am going to see where the Christians live.” But verily it requires a journey to find the Christians in many parts of what is called Christendom. At Antioch, you may seek them as Diogenes sought a man at Athens, and not find them. Nay, the very name has been made infamous there, and throughout all the East ; so that men would take the word of a Jew, or a Mussulman, rather than of a Christian. The name given by Gentiles has been profaned, by Gentiles under the Christian name. The crusades exhibited, among those called Christians, scenes which might make a barbarian, or an atheist, blush.

I fall back on the names they bore, ere ever Antioch gave them that which has been rendered infamous by being applied to whole nations of sinners, with scarcely one disciple of Christ. For when I see what idolatry in religion, what villany in practice, has been covered by the name of Christian, I cease to wonder that Christ never employed that name, or that his apostles never mention it, except as that by which Gentiles call us.

But if, shocked at the infamy that has been poured on the name given us by the men of Antioch, *can* we fall back on the appellations that are more ancient than the Christian name, and more honoured, being applied to us by our Lord, his apostles, and church? Can we take the name of disciples? Say, have you obeyed the voice, "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls"? Have you sat at his feet, watched his lips, received the law from his mouth, learned the mind of Christ, and received for religious truth all that, and nothing but that, which came from Him who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life"?

Can you, instead of the comparatively modern title, Christian, take the more ancient name of believers? Have you, with the heart, believed unto righteousness; saying, "Lord, to whom shall we go, but unto thee; thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the son of the living God"? May we, then, address you as an apostle did the ancient believers, "Him having not seen, ye love; in him, though now ye see him not; yet, believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory"? Can you say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Could you, instead of Christians, be called saints, as the ancient disciples were, by apostles and holy men, who "knew not to give flattering titles"? Were they to return to life, would they repeat to you their own words, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people"? Is "holiness to the Lord" written on your heart by the Spirit of sanctification, inscribed on your house, stamped on your property, breathed in your conversation, exemplified in all your actions? Jesus "gave himself to redeem us from the present evil world, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

May you be called brethren, by all that love our Lord Jesus Christ, because they see in you the family likeness, the fraternal affection! Would Paul say, if he saw you, "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high priest of our profession, Jesus Christ"?

Are you friends, loving and beloved, wherever Christ is

known, and wherever he says, "Behold, my mother, and my brethren; for they who hear the word of God, and keep it, the same is my mother, my sister, and my brother"?

I must not close without reminding you, that, as Antioch, the third city of the vast Roman empire, early gave us the name by which we have since been called, it is manifest that our religion lurked not in holes and corners, sought not to impose on illiterate villagers; but won its first triumphs over the mythology of the Greeks, in the crowded, cultivated cities, where it challenged the literary and philosophical, to meet it in the field of argument, and made the banner of the cross wave victorious over the fallen gods of Syria, Greece, and Rome. Where Julian wrote his "Misopogon," we had long before been called Christians.

The thirteenth Lecture proclaims the increase and notoriety of the disciples of Christ, for whom the world, now finding itself obliged to find a name, adopted that of Christian.

LECTURE XIV.

PETER'S DELIVERANCE AND HEROD'S DEATH.

ACTS xii.

THAT "no man knoweth love, or hatred, by all that is before him," we are this day reminded; for we are called to see apostles weltering in their blood, or lying chained in a dungeon; and their persecutor on a throne, arrayed in gorgeous robes, and hailed as a God. But that we should "judge nothing before the time, till the Lord come, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness," we are also taught; for in the same narrative we see Christ's prisoner drop his chains, touched by an angel's wand; and the idolised monarch given to the worms. Come, shrink not from a visit to a dungeon, for not only an apostle but an angel is there; and as peculiar importance is attached to the sufferings of Peter, so this is the last time you will behold him as a confessor, and, but once more, will see him in this history at all. To the persecution of the church, the deliverance of Peter, and the death of Herod, our attention is claimed.

I. THE PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH extends from verse 1 to 5.

About this time, soon after the famine previously mentioned, Herod the king, the Syriac adds, "who was surnamed Agrippa,"

which was his real name, laid hands, not merely to vex, but to injure some of those who were of the church. Herod the Great, whose murderous treatment of his own family not having extinguished it, gave name to this grandson, who, after numerous vicissitudes, had become the favourite of Cæsar, and successor to all the power and territory of the founder of the family. From the lords of the world, this scion of Herod, the Idumæan, had acquired a taste for magnificence, which flattered the national vanity of the Jews, with whom he was such a favourite, that Josephus lauds him to the skies. My young friends should study his remarkable history, for it is instructive, though I cannot now enter into the detail.

The injuries he did to some of the members of the church are rather hinted than recorded; and we are simply told that "he killed James, the brother of John, with the sword." What! is this all that is said of the martyrdom of an apostle! Yes; the death of Jesus is told four times over, with a minuteness that produces an indelible impression, while we are almost in danger of forgetting what is despatched in half a dozen words. But was James "crucified for you?" the historian seems to say. The death of Stephen, the first martyr, though not an apostle, is portrayed at full length; and now that you have learned how believers die for Christ, it is enough to know that James thus died. Our Lord had told the mother of the children of Zebedee that she knew not what she asked, when she said, "Grant that these, my two sons, may sit, one on thy right hand, the other on thy left, in thy kingdom." "They shall, indeed, drink of my cup;" and of this James soon drank, it may be, because he was a Boanerges. This is all we know of his history, as he perhaps was seized and killed without a trial; but he died for Christ, and that is more than whole volumes of ordinary biography. When I think of this, I blush for what is written of so many far inferior; and I admire the Scriptures for what they do not, as well as for what they do say. It is not their design to magnify mere men; for apostles hide themselves behind their Saviour's cross. Son of Zebedee, thy honours shall not be lost, nor too long delayed; when they who "loved not their lives unto the death," but were beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, shall be seen at his right hand, adorned with martyrs' crowns. Oh, let our history be unrecorded here, and our names written in heaven, our story

told among those who "overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony."

That Herod ventured to kill James, and intended to execute Peter, has been ascribed to the peculiarity of the time, when no Roman governor was in Judea; but I believe it arose from the plenitude of power, with which the king was invested, by the favour of Claudius, who owed much to him, so that he was the only king of Judea, after Herod, that acted as lord of life and death. James was not crucified, according to Roman practice, but beheaded, which was esteemed the worst of the four forms of execution adopted by the Jews. To the Christian church it must have been an astonishing event; as they had hitherto seen apostles miraculously delivered, and the enemy had, for some time, feared to lay hands on them. After Stephen's death, they were "all scattered abroad, except the apostles." But our Lord having no design to exclude the twelve from the honour of sealing their testimony with their blood, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" was called to weep over the grave of James, and say, "Alas, my brother; very lovely and pleasant wast thou to me in life, nor by death shall we be for ever divided."

The persecutor, having perceived that the death of James pleased the Jews, who praised him as another Phineas for zeal, proceeded to take Peter also, as another captain of the Christian band. "Then were the days of unleavened bread." The Jews had a king after their own heart, who, perceiving they thirsted for the blood of the Christians, was willing to "give it them to drink in great measure." Alas, for them both! The people soon paid for this guilty pleasure with bitterest pains, and the king was quickly called to answer for apostles' blood with his own. The Jews were purging their houses from leaven, but cared not that their hands were defiled with blood. They had intended to kill Christ, after the Passover, though it was decreed that he should die at that feast; and now they design to slay Peter, after the same feast; as if they would show their contempt for an institution which reminded them of their own deliverance from oppression. As Herod imitated the heathen customs of the Romans, in their cruel gladiatorial shows, he has been suspected of an intention thus to make Peter a spectacle to the Jews.

Having seized, the king put in prison the apostle, delivering him to soldiers, in four parties, each consisting of four; so that

the Syriac simply says, "sixteen soldiers," to relieve guard every watch; and while two were chained to the prisoner, the other two stood sentinels at the gate. As to intending, after *Easter*, to bring him forth to the people, it is one of the instances of handling the word of God, carelessly or deceitfully; for there is in the Greek, *Pascha*; and of *Easter*, as a Christian feast, the Scriptures know nothing.

Our translators, having just mentioned the days of unleavened bread, ought to have employed here *Passover*, which seems to be made, as it really was, a feast distinct from that of unleavened bread. The intention was to make the slaughter of Peter a part of the entertainment given to those who came up to the feast. Superstition and blood go hand in hand, and they who trust to a religion of forms think they do God service by killing those who worship him in spirit and in truth.

"Peter, therefore, was kept in the prison; but prayer was incessantly made by the church to God for him." Herod was in hope of gratifying the Jews, and receiving their plaudits for his zeal in their behalf, and "all the expectation of the people of the Jews" was directed towards the death of Peter, who had so long amazed them, by his boldness, zeal, and success. On the other hand, the church, full of love for Peter, and solicitude for his continued usefulness, incessantly cried to God, in whose hand are all hearts, and "to whom belong the issues from death," saying, "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth; the faithful fail from among the children of men. Shall Peter so soon follow James, and leave us sorrow upon sorrow?"

The enemy may have mocked at their prayers, when he looked at his soldiers, his prison, and his chains; but the church knew that nothing was too hard for the Lord, and that the prayer which opened heaven's gate, could open any other.

II. PETER'S DELIVERANCE FROM PRISON. Ver. 6—17.

Here all was striking,—the time—the mode—the result.

The time was fitted to show that, "in the mount the Lord shall be seen;" for man's extremity is God's opportunity. Herod was just about to bring him forth, and on that night was Peter sleeping between two soldiers, bound to him with two chains, which fastened a soldier to each arm; while the keepers before the door guarded the prison. All was dark in the dungeon,

save where a glimmering lamp, perhaps, was burning for the soldiers' sakes; and all was silent, save where the sound of the breathing told that all three were fast asleep. For Peter, having committed to Christ the question, whether he should die to-morrow or not, may have sung, "with melody in his heart," the third Psalm, "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me," &c.

But could Herod, or the leaders of the Jews, sleep? The king might say, "How I shall gratify my subjects by this execution! But then, the consequences! I have heard of what wonders this Peter has wrought! If his magic has healed, may not his magic kill too? I may pay dearly for the popularity I thus acquire." The high priests—how could they sleep, when they remembered that they had been disappointed in their attempts on Peter before? "Twice," they would say, "we thought we had him in our net, and he escaped. We shall never be sure, till we see him dead and buried. But shall we, even then? We thought we should, when we had killed and buried Jesus, called the Christ!"

Now to the throne of Christ ascend the intense supplications of the church, assembled in yonder street; and He that sitteth in the heavens laughs at the enemy's rage, saying to the "spirits that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word," "Go down, and deliver my servant." Swift as the lightning's flash, the angel of the Lord came to the apostle, unobstructed by walls, or gates, or bars; as though Peter, like Jacob, were sleeping in the open field. See the light that shines in that dreary abode, shaming the glimmering lamp, showing the damp walls, the floor spotted with blood of numerous victims murdered there, like John the Baptist! But I see you are looking at Peter's face, now the light shines on it, wondering that he can sleep so sweetly with two such armed ruffians chained at each hand. But who knows what heavenly visions filled his soul with peace and joy?

The angel struck Peter's side, waked him, saying, "Rise quickly; and his chains fell from his hands," remaining fast, only at the other end, on the soldiers' hands; though Peter had before thought, "How can I rise without waking the soldiers, and obtaining their leave?" And the angel said, "Fasten thy sash around thee, and put thy sandals on;" and he did so: and he said, "Throw thy cloak around, and follow

me ;” “and the angel having gone out, Peter followed him, yet knew not that it was true that was done by the angel, but seemed to see a vision,” like what he had seen at Joppa ; for when the Lord “turned the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.” But they have left the dungeon and the sleeping soldiers, and “the stout-hearted are spoiled ; they have slept their sleep, and none of the men of might have found their hands.” Through a first and a second guard, unperceived, the angel conducts Peter, till they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which was, as an automaton, opened to them, moving on its massy hinges, without hands, and without creaking noise. “Now, going out, they advanced one street, and immediately the angel left him.”

Do not ask why the angel forsook him in the dark, instead of seeing him safe home. For it was a light night, as the Passover is celebrated when the moon is at the full, and the apostle knows his way to his friend's house. But Peter being come to himself, and no longer saying, “Whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell,” exclaimed, “Now I know truly that the Lord has sent his angel and delivered me from the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.”

Not the first time that he had been miraculously delivered was this ; but the scene which we have just beheld was so remote from all the ordinary occurrences of life, that we cannot wonder at its bewildering influence to create doubts whether it was not all imaginative, or visionary. But now that the angel had disappeared, and nothing was left but the solemn realities of his position,—alone in the city ; at night ; just escaped from his guards, his chains, his cell ; Peter can enjoy the devotional reflections : “Then it is true. My Lord has heard his churches' prayers, and it was an angel sent from him that passed through walls and guards unperceived, and with his light illumined the dungeon, and touched my fetters, and made them fall, and brought me here. Herod, I have escaped thy hands, by hands mightier than thine ! Vain are your expectations, O Jews, that this morning you shall see me brought forth to die !”

Reflecting on his proper course, he went to the house of that one of the Marys who was the mother of John, not the apostle, but the person usually called Mark ; and, as she was sister to Barnabas, the Levite, who sold an estate to relieve the poor saints,

she seems to have been a widow of property, whose house was large, and consecrated to Christian hospitality, which made it most fit to receive him at that hour. Here a considerable number were assembled, praying, doubtless, for Peter's deliverance or support. He knocked at the door that was formed in the great gate, as we sometimes see in magnificent mansions, and a maiden came to hearken; not a mere servant, probably, but a daughter of some Christian there, and as her name was Rhoda, which is the Greek for Rose, she was, perhaps, born among the Greeks. Her coming to listen, in order to know, by asking, who was there, whether it were friend or foe, intimates that she was a confidential person; and she knew Peter's voice when he told who he was, and bade her not to be afraid to open. For, when they who were assembled at night, in persecuting times, to pray for deliverance, being threatened with the martyrdom of their chief apostle, next morning, heard a knock at the door, they naturally started and said, "Who can that be?" Is the enemy come to break up our meeting, and drag us all away to prison? They would send to the gate none but a trusty friend. When Rose found that it was no enemy, but Peter himself; in her joy, which speaks her love for Christ and his apostle, forgetting that she left him standing in the street, she, without opening, ran in and told that Peter stood before the gate. But they said to her, "Are you mad?" So little did they expect what God wrought! So easy it is to charge with madness those who know more of God's works than we have learned! But as she persisted that it was so, they said, "It is his angel." The wondrous differences that God has given to human voices, though all proceeding from an aperture not more than an eighth of an inch, by which the breath passes from the lungs, serve a thousand important purposes in the moral world, detecting imposture and giving security to innocence, and affording consolation to mourning friends. What the company within meant, by saying, "It is his angel," we cannot exactly ascertain, for the word signifies messenger. Had they the notion, which has since been common, that, previously to death, a spirit or vision of the person sometimes appears to his friends? If so, they must have supposed the presentiment came by voices as well as sights; for Peter had not yet been seen. Did they think that each one had a guardian angel; or, because Christ said, "they are equal to angels," think the departed spirit an angel, a personification of himself in voice as well as

face? Whatever was their meaning, as they were mistaken, it proves nothing, but that the first disciples, though occasionally delivered, did not usually expect miracles, and were slow to believe that their own prayers had been so wonderfully answered.

Peter still kept knocking, till they opened, and saw him, and were astonished. Their burst of grateful welcome, their exclamations, "while we were calling, the Lord was answering," held Peter in abeyance, till he waved his hand for them to be silent, when he "related to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison." Though, to us, this is a tale of olden times, which we have heard often repeated, it is still as fresh and vigorous as if it were new. But what must have been its effect on them who heard it, in the very night in which the events occurred, and when the whole was related by the lips of the man who saw and felt it all?

But he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brethren;" for, though James, the brother of John, had been killed, there was another left alive. "*Uno avulso, non deficit alter.*" James, the Lord's brother, or kinsman, the son of Alphæus, generally called James the Less, who wrote the epistle which bears his name, and who seems to have remained at Jerusalem, must have been delighted, with all the others who were not at Mary's house that night, to hear of the deliverance of Peter. He went to another place, probably quitting the capital, and setting out on an itineracy, till the storm was hushed by the death of the king. The apostles were not forbidden, but rather commanded, when persecuted in one city, to flee to another, thus turning persecution into a royal progress of the truth. Peter, then, still lives and labours; though we have to behold,

III. THE DEATH OF HEROD. Ver. 18—24.

For while men supposed that it was the apostle who was to die; lo, it was the king whose doom was sealed.

When it was day, and they came to bring forth, to the expectant people, their victim; the two soldiers waked up, each one to find a chain on his own arm, but no prisoner at the other end. I see them looking round with surprise, and examining with minute attention, to discover how the chains were filed or slipped off. I hear them ask the other two at the door, whether they have let him out? They say, the door was not opened. The authorities enter and look around, and ask, where is your prisoner? but

echo replies, "Where?" No one can tell. All that the two soldiers can say, is, they went to sleep with him chained to them, but when they awoke he was gone; and all that the others at the door, in the first and second guard-rooms, can say, is, that they let no one out. No small trouble the affair gives to the soldiers, who knew that their own lives were liable to pay for Peter's.

Herod sought for Peter and found him not. It seems that the king searched, not only the prison but the city, in hopes of finding him somewhere concealed. But not having succeeded, he examined the guards, probably with tortures, and either suspecting, or pretending to suspect, that they had been bribed to do what was designed to be prevented, by chaining the prisoner to them, Herod commanded that they should be strangled, according to one manuscript, or, as others, led away to death. This injustice, which was designed to cover the tyrant's mortification and defeat, fell, probably, on none but the two who were chained to Peter that night, and who may have shared in the persecuting spirit of their masters; though it is not uncommon, in this world, for a man to suffer even unto death for a crime of which he is innocent. Before God, all deserve to die, and there is another world to re-judge the false judgments of this; though we may now see

The speedy judgment executed on the king. He, having gone down from Judea, where he was, perhaps, ashamed of having been defeated by the escape of his intended victim, went to Cesarea, the seat of the Roman government, but now left under his rule. He spent some time there, "waging war in his own mind against the Tyrians and Sidonians," who bordered on Cesarea, and who, probably, had been slow to give honour to a proud upstart, whose kingdom they had lately seen, and might soon see again, a mere province under a Roman.

The Tyrians were wise enough to avoid the war which threatened them, by coming with unanimity to him, on his arrival in their neighbourhood; and, having secured a friend at court, by persuading Blastus, the lord of the king's bed-chamber, to favour them, they asked for peace. For they had been, for ages, a nation of merchants, with little else but a sea-port, and no territory that could supply them with corn; so that their district was fed by that of the king, which, in its turn, opened a market for their merchandise.

Of this peace the Tyrians were, doubtless, not more glad than

Herod, who, with all his bluster, would have been afraid to make war on the allies of Rome ; and, therefore, the more ostentatiously displayed his friendship, seizing the opportunity to play the monarch's part in gorgeous style. On an appointed day, Herod, having put on royal apparel, sat down on the tribunal, and made a popular harangue, praising his own equity and moderation. The people of Tyre and Sidon, perhaps knowing his vanity, and wishing to confirm the peace, responded by a gross flattery, exclaiming, " A god's voice, and not a man's ! " " Immediately an angel of the Lord smote him ; because he gave not glory to God, and, becoming worm-eaten, he expired." I have given you the narrative of Luke, as literally as possible, that you may compare, or rather contrast, it with that of the same event by Josephus, whence we may derive much valuable instruction. Had the inspired historian affirmed that Herod was smitten with death for his conduct to James and Peter, *we* should naturally have assented ; and monkish historians have abounded with such tales. But Luke teaches us that God passed by this, as well as many other instances of persecution, and smote Herod for a different crime—suffering himself to be hailed as a god, instead of reproving the impious idolatry. For, however the affronted Majesty of heaven may have borne with Caligula and others, who set themselves up for gods ; in Herod, a professed Jew, the crime was treated as far more enormous ; according to the language of God to Israel, " You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore you will I punish." Though we are forbidden by our Lord to invent, or suspect, crimes for men, on account of their afflictions ; yet, when we know their guilt, we ought to see the uplifted arm of vengeance, so that a man shall say, " Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth." A sinful man suffers himself to be called a god, and is instantly smitten with mortal pains, and dies, worms preying upon his carcase. The exact import of Luke's Greek word is worm-eaten, which we might apply to wood, though we should not say it was " eaten up of worms."

To be wilfully blind to the judgment of God against the sin known to have been committed, is to expose ourselves to the reproach, " Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see, but they shall see and be ashamed." That the punishment was ascribed by the sacred writer not to the persecution of his co-

religionists and beloved friends, is an additional proof that he assigned the true cause,—a mortal's assumption of that glory which belongs to God alone.

Having now seen the naked truth; turn and look at the meretricious paint, and fictitious ornaments, introduced by the Jewish historian, Josephus. "Herod came to the city of Cesarea, where multitudes were collected to celebrate games in honour of Cæsar. On the second day of the spectacle, having put on a robe admirably wrought all over with silver, he entered early into the theatre, when the first rays of the sun were reflected from the precious metal, with a dazzling splendour, that created awe. His flatterers hailed him a god, praying, 'Be propitious to us; for if, hitherto, we have revered thee as a man, henceforth, we will confess thee to be better than a mortal.' The king refused not the impious flattery; but, soon after, looking up, saw an owl sitting on a cord, and knew this was an evil omen, as it had formerly been a good one. Immediately, seized with intense excruciating pains in the bowels, he cried out, 'I, your god, am ordered out of the world.' After five days of agony, he died." The silver robe, and the portentous owl, we leave to Josephus, whose Grecian arts serve to show how much more beautiful is a diamond without paint. Where Luke sees an angel, Josephus finds an owl; but who needs to be told where lies the truth? Luke says, the popular shout was, "A God's voice, and not a man's." Instead of which, Josephus gives us a fine rounded oratorical period. Michaelis justly observes, that this may be better Greek, but is far less probable history. The shouts of a crowd are anything but the periods of an orator.

Thus Herod died: but "the word of God increased" in sphere, and multiplied in its agency; for, though James fell a martyr, Peter lived a preacher, and his deliverance, which could be no secret, rendered his ministry more striking wherever he went preaching Christ.

The sufferings of Peter were pointed out, at the beginning of this lecture, as worthy of special notice; and though we have already seen him in gaol, first with John, and then with all the apostles, we must now pause, to dwell upon his imprisonment alone. This was necessary, to prove his complete recovery from a cowardly fall; that, having learned from him

what we are when left to our own weakness, we may see also that we can "do all things, through Christ strengthening us." This test of Peter's courage and fidelity was the more decisive, because James, having just been killed by the sword, had taught the apostles that, though frequently delivered, they were not exempt from a martyr's death. As Peter thought his deliverance a mere vision, and the disciples deemed her mad, who said she heard his voice; it is probable that all parties thought he might soon follow James to the grave. Yet he slept sweetly. Not so, the night he denied his Lord, for then "he went out and wept bitterly." Would you escape sleepless nights, spent in watering your couch with your tears, own Christ in the face of death; spend your days in serving him; for then you may say, "Lo, thou givest thy beloved sleep."

For "the angel of the Lord campeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Whether, therefore, they sleep, like Jacob, with no other canopy but that of heaven; or, with Peter, in the dungeon, with the sword of death hanging over their heads;

"Bright seraphs, despatched from the throne,
Repair to the stations assigned;
And angels elect are sent down
To guard the elect of mankind."

The Author of the creation gives to his creatures powers according to his pleasure. Inferior beings may wonder at the way in which we lord it over them all; as we wonder that angels enter prisons, dissolve iron fetters, mock the power of mortals, and do the bidding of the Great Supreme. Still they say to Christians, "We are your fellow-servants, and of those that keep the testimony of Jesus."

Wo to the enemies of Jesus, if an angel of the Lord smite them; for then worms shall conquer kings. The ruin designed for the pious shall come upon the wicked, and the preacher of righteousness shall go forward with his work. The interpositions of angels are not always reserved for the deliverance of oppressed preachers, but sometimes are sent to humble proud princes, and shame their unprincipled flatterers, holding

up to them a worm-eaten corpse, and saying, "Behold your god." Never are the wicked covered with deeper shame, than when, persecuting for conscience sake, and forbidding to publish the glad tidings of the Saviour, the angel of death is sent to hurl them from their abused tribunal; so that it shall then be said, "But the word of the Lord grew and multiplied." Thus the Stuarts were driven from the British throne, that, under the present royal family, religious liberty might increase, and the churches of Christ be multiplied.

Peter's departure to another place, and his message to James, who, after this, seems to have taken his post at Jerusalem, are intimations of the apostolic movement, from the persecuting Jews to the Gentile world.

Learn, then, to say with the Psalmist, "Lord, deliver me from men of the world, who have their portion in this life: as for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness." For who would not rather be Peter than Herod? Who would not dread the glittering silver robe, under which lurks the gnawing worm? Who does not say, Give me rather to lie down and die in a dungeon, in chains, and be waked up to new life by the touch of an angel of light, to hear the music of his voice, "Follow me"?

The evidences of truth, minute and various, which attend this narrative, are well displayed by Lardner, in the commencement of his immortal work on the "Credibility of the Gospel History." Such proofs of Luke's accurate knowledge and perfect veracity, are there exhibited in quotations from ancient writers, especially Josephus, that all who wish to satisfy their minds, should seize the opportunity of seeing what the most candid of modern writers has advanced, in support of this part of the inspired history of the church of God.

Our fourteenth stage bids us observe how judgment and mercy go hand in hand, while a king of Judea lies smitten as a disappointed persecutor; and the apostle of the circumcision, delivered from prison and from death, leaves Jerusalem for some other place.

LECTURE XV.

THE MISSION OF PAUL AND BARNABAS TO THE ISLE OF CYPRUS.

Acts xii. 25—xiii. 12.

“LISTEN, O isles, unto me,” said Messiah, by his prophet Isaiah. “Hearken, ye people, from afar, the Lord hath called me from the womb, and made my mouth like a sharp sword, and said, Thou art my servant, in whom I will be glorified. It is a light thing that thou shouldst raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the preserved of Israel! I will give thee for a light of the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the ends of the earth.” “The isles shall wait for his law.” While we islanders remember how early the Gospel came across the seas, to bless the land of our nativity; and, as members of a missionary society, recall the steps by which we were led to make the islands of the Pacific our first field of labour; we adore him that “said to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back; bring my sons from afar.” Let these associations increase the interest with which we now witness an extraordinary event, at Antioch, as introductory to a mission to the isle of Cyprus.

I. THE MOVEMENT OF THE CLOUD OF GOD’S PRESENCE, FROM THE CONTINENT, TOWARDS THE ISLES. Ver. 1, 2, 3.

Saul and Barnabas had exercised a kind of deaconship for

“the poor saints at Jerusalem,” to which the apostle refers, in his letter to the Galatians. Returning from this benevolent journey, they brought with them John (called Mark, to distinguish him from the apostle) as a witness, perhaps, to the Antiochians of the faithful transmission of their charities to the Jews. Antioch soon became, among the Gentile converts, what Jerusalem was to the Jewish disciples; and the newly-formed church contained “prophets and teachers.” The former word often signifies interpreters of Scripture; but, as different gifts are mentioned, and a future event divinely announced, I take prophets here in the strictest sense, including such as Agabus, who had predicted the famine.

The order in which the gifted persons are mentioned has naturally created discussion; for Saul, the only apostle, comes last; and Luke, the historian, is supposed to have here introduced himself, before Saul. The editor of Calmet suggests the only principle of arrangement that can be discovered: that the names stand according to seniority of discipleship, as they were found in the church books. If so, Barnabas comes first, as the senior disciple. In mentioning the next, Luke latinises, saying, “Simeon, called Niger,” black, the origin of our “negro;” but this is Latin, not Greek, the language of the Acts. The person is supposed to be “Simon, the Cyrenean, an African, father of Alexander and Rufus, and he who carried the cross after our Lord.” Next to these early disciples, comes Lucius of Cyrene, supposed, by Mr. Charles Taylor, to be the historian, Luke, whose name is Latinised; for the Greek is Lukas; but when mentioned to those who spoke Latin, he is called Lucius, one of Paul’s kinsmen, Romans xvi. 21. We find Lucius supposed by Paley to be put for Lucas, to which Lightfoot inclines. He is thought to have been one of the two whom our Lord met with, on the way to Emmaus, which Luke alone records, saying, that one of them was Cleophas; and it is quite in keeping with the manner of the sacred penman, that the other who is not mentioned, should be the writer himself. He was, then, a senior disciple, who, though educated at Cyrene, as a physician, was in Judea an eye-witness of what he relates in the Gospel, as well as the Acts.

The person called Manaen was, according to the custom of the times, brought up as a noble companion, in education and

sports, with Herod, not the Great, nor the king mentioned in the preceding chapter ; but the ruler of a tetrarchy, or fourth part of the first Herod's monarchy. With Manaen's rank, his age also is intimated, as a senior, of a former reign. Saul, being young compared with the others, comes last.

Luke, then, was not, as some say, one of the seventy ; for they were of Galilee, and he was of Cyrene. This senior is supposed to have died at the age of fourscore, soon after the period of which the close of this book of the Acts speaks.

The five persons thus enumerated were ministering to the Lord, and fasting ; probably asking guidance for their onward movements, judging that so many prophets and teachers were not to remain at Antioch, while the world lay in darkness and death. Our Lord had said, that when he, the Bridegroom, should be taken from the church, it would fast. But how ? By command ? By rule ? On Wednesdays and Fridays ? For forty days in Lent ? By eating fish instead of flesh ? All this is unscriptural ; inconsistent with the genius of our religion ; a yoke of ceremonies heavier than that law of Moses, from which Christ delivered us ; and which enjoined but one fast in the year. Men, destitute of religion, make a merit of an unwilling fast ; but Christians fast when they judge it needful, and so privately, that they "appear not to men to fast." In the case before us, many had a common reason for fasting together, with a view to a mission to the heathen ; but the world around them knew nothing of the fast.

To their united prayers the Holy Ghost replied, "Separate to me Barnabas and Saul, to the work to which I have called them ; and they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, departed." The Holy Spirit here speaks, and is spoken of, as a person and divine. Had the Father or the Son been mentioned, instead of the Spirit, who would have thought of anything but personality ? Why should a different rule of interpretation be adopted, because the Spirit is the subject ? The twelve had been imprisoned ; one killed ; another miraculously delivered ; and now they begin to be scattered through the earth.

Separated by a divine call, in a voice from heaven, or from one of the prophets, to a *work*, not a sinecure, the first missionaries to the heathen world went forth ; but Luke informs us *he* was not now chosen to be the companion of Paul.

Clement, of Alexandria, introduces Peter, affirming that the Lord directed the apostles, after twelve years, to go forth into the world, lest any should say, "We have not heard." They who were of Antioch, having fasted and prayed, laid their hands on the two, and dismissed them. The author of a new version of the Acts, with notes, says, "Barnabas and Saul received holy orders, in due form, at Antioch." Then they had been exercising their ministry, for years, before they received, in due form, holy orders. And who now conferred them? Not an apostle; for the only apostle mentioned here was Saul; who, instead of being the ordainer, was the ordained. Not a bishop; for the first appointments to that office are recorded in the following chapter. Neither orders nor office were conferred by this laying on of hands, which was but a significant sign of special prayer for these two chosen men. With the sovereignty which selected them, was combined wisdom and grace, in sending Barnabas to his native isle, to preach to friends for whose salvation he doubtless longed; and associating with him a younger labourer, superior in office, but a stranger in Cyprus.

II. SEE NOW THE CLOUD PRESENTING ITS DARK AND ITS BRIGHT SIDE, IN THIS FIRST FAVOURED ISLE. Ver. 4—13.

Being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, they went by land about fifteen miles, to Seleucia, the seaport of Antioch, and thence sailed to Cyprus; as if we should say, "We went down to Gravesend, and sailed over to the Isle of Wight." For Cyprus, one of the most populous islands in the Mediterranean, containing nearly two millions of inhabitants, was imbedded in the coast of Canaan and Syria. Conspicuous at a distance, and celebrated for its forests of cypresses, as well as its fertility in corn; it was infamous for the worship of Venus, a deified harlot, whose temple was too horribly polluted to be described. But the worse the Cypriots were, the more they needed the "faithful saying, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief;" and by the guidance of the Spirit, he who called himself the chief of sinners, came into this wilderness, to seek the lost sheep.

Landing on the coast opposite to Antioch, Salamis was the chief city, to which came Paul and Barnabas, who preached in the synagogues of the Jews, they being too numerous to meet in

one. For Jews who were strangers were allowed to read the law and the prophets, which afforded these two an opportunity of showing how the Scriptures testified of Christ: with what success we are not told.

But we are informed that the two whom the Spirit sent, had John (Mark) for their minister; so that, having brought him from Jerusalem to Antioch, they took him with them to Cyprus, to attend upon them, and supply such services as a new mission in a foreign, Gentile, and dissolute country might demand. Thus far, we see nothing remarkable; but now, "having gone through the isle, to Paphos," on the western side, they become the instruments of judgment and mercy.

1. *Judgment.* For they found, in this seat of government, famous for a temple of Venus, whence she was called the Paphian, as well as Cyprian, goddess, a certain Jew, who was a Magian, or magician, "a prophet of lies," as the Syriac calls him, whose name was Bar-Jesus, son of Jesus, or Joshua. Luther says, Jehu; but the Syriac names him Bar-Suma. Well might the apostle say to the Jews, "The name of God is blasphemed through you, among the Gentiles, as it is written." We shall shortly find the seven sons of Sceva, a Jew, imposing on mankind, at Ephesus. This impostor was in attendance on one who should not be called the Deputy, but the Proconsul, Sergius Paulus, the governor of Cyprus. Not Luke, but his censors, are chargeable with historical inaccuracy here; for when the jealousy of the Emperors had removed proconsuls, history informs us that Cyprus was an exception, as Lardner has shown, and a medal has proved. Sergius Paulus, "a sensible man," considered the religion of the Jews preferable to that of Rome, and, therefore, hearkened to one who proved an unworthy son of Abraham. Hearing, however, that Barnabas and Saul had begun preaching at Paphos, "the Proconsul called for them, and desired to hear the word of God," which, it seems, they preached to him in the presence of Bar-Jesus.

"But Elymas, the sorcerer (for so is his name, Elymas, when interpreted, or translated), withstood them." The name seems to be Arabic, usually written Ulema, signifying recondite science, to which the Magians pretended. This man sought to turn away the Proconsul from the faith, lest it should supplant himself at

court; and Justin Martyr accuses the Jews of sending men through the world, to calumniate Christianity.

“Then Saul (who also is called Paul), filled with the Holy Spirit, set his eyes on the magician,” to pierce his conscience; “and said, O, full of all deceit,” towards the Governor, by false representations of the Christian faith; “and all craft,” in pursuit of thine own gain; “child of the Accuser,” whom thou art imitating by calumnies; “enemy of all righteousness,” which is revealed in Christ; “wilt thou not cease perverting the ways of the Lord, which are right?” “And now, behold, the hand of the Lord, whom thou hast blasphemed, is upon thee. And thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell upon him a mist and darkness, and he, turning this way and that, was seeking those who might lead him by the hand. Then the Proconsul, having seen what was done, believed,” being struck, not merely by the miracle of judgment, but by “the doctrine of the Lord;” for he saw it, confirmed by the blindness with which he was smitten who would have blinded others, with false charges against the truth. For Sergius Paulus had heard the word, which is the object of faith, and of whose divinity miracles are Heaven’s seal.

The terrific sound of this threatening from the lips of Paul teaches us that the Gospel proclaims, “There is forgiveness with God; *that he may be feared.*” The apostle’s address to Bar-Jesus demands some comment, lest any should charge it with vindictive passion. I notice this the more earnestly, because it is analogous with those imprecations in the Psalms, which some have condemned, as proofs of a revengeful spirit. But when you find these imprecations to be prophecies of events which the Psalmist himself could not understand; but were to be fulfilled in persons whom the Psalmist could not know, as they were to live in distant future ages,—for instance, Judas, and the Romans, and leaders of the Jewish nation,—who would make these imprecations, proofs of a revengeful spirit? In like manner, when you find that the severe language of the apostle to this Jewish impostor, was but an introduction to a prophecy of judgment, which Heaven immediately fulfilled; can you doubt that he was, as the historian affirms, filled with the Holy Spirit, whose influence dictated the severe epithets, and the prediction of a future event, which, if not fulfilled,

would have covered the Apostle with shame? That in this address he was a prophet, the event proves; and who would impute to a prophet the vengeance he predicts?

From this time, Saul is called Paul. The change of name, so complete, is the more remarkable, because we cannot say the meaning is the same, but expressed in different languages; for Saul the Hebrew name, signifies *desired*, and Paul is the Latin for *little*. Though Chrysostom calls him "a three-cubit man," there is no evidence that he was short, if "his bodily presence was mean." One writer affirms, that, "at his baptism, he dropped Saul, the persecutor, and took up Paul, the apostle;" but when this change is recorded, he had been baptized several years. Another tells us, "a master changes the name of his slave; and Christ, having captured Saul, changed him to Paul;" though he was called Saul, long after his conversion. A third, thinks that Sergius Paulus gave his own name to the apostle, as an honourable sign of adoption; or Paul took it, to celebrate his triumph, as Scipio was called Africanus. There is, however, not only too much of the world in these notions, but the testimony of Luke against them; for he says, Saul was called Paul, before he records the conversion of Sergius Paulus. The probability is, that Saulus, being strange to the Gentiles, the Romans in Cyprus took the liberty of changing the first letter, to render the name at once familiar and respectful, Paulus being then common, because popular at Cyprus, as Victoria is with us. The apostle may have complied with the change, under Divine direction, to indicate his Roman citizenship; which was to be to him a shield against persecution, when travelling through the empire; and the Proconsul may have registered him, as Paulus, to give the name legal force. The opinion that he always had the two names; but was called Saul among the Orientals, and Paul among the Latins, will not stand; for the change to Paul is introduced at Cyprus, an eastern isle, and he is never after, even in Judea, called Saul.

Who can look at these three; the apostle, the sorcerer, and the Proconsul, without deep emotions? See the man who once heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Saul, why persecutest thou me," pursuing the vocation which sovereign mercy then gave, and bearing Christ's name to the Gentiles, appearing before "rulers and kings." To him who "remembered the

wormwood and the gall," and sighed for the conversion of his countrymen, whose enmity to Christ he had formerly inflamed, what could be more bitter than to find his chief opponent, a Jew, a conjuror, a false prophet, seeking to turn the governor from the faith which Paul now preached, but once destroyed? While he who says, "I obtained mercy," pronounces a sentence of judgment on Bar-Jesus, we recall Paul's own words: "vessels of mercy, prepared for glory;" "vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction."

But, see Elymas moving his hands before his eyes, as though he thought a spider's web hung before them, or a smoke had arisen, to obstruct his sight; and expected to wipe away the hindrance to his accustomed clearness of vision. But, ah! the mist thickens, the darkness becomes deeper, and the conviction fastens on his mind, that the sentence of Paul is fulfilled!

The poor blind man, afraid of affronting the Proconsul, by stumbling against him, turns to the right hand and to the left, for some friendly hand to guide him. What self-reproaches should have been wrung from his soul! "Wretch that I was, to belie my convictions, in order to preserve my credit, and influence, and gain! How justly has God humbled me, before Sergius! I have attempted to blind the minds of men, and God has put out my own eyes! O sun! I feel thy heat only to tell me that I have lost thy glorious light! But the sentence was 'for a season.' How long? When shall the light of my eyes be restored, and I cease to say, Seasons return, but not to me returns day?"

It has been said, that he was not only cured of the blindness of his body, but of that of his mind also, and became a convert to the faith of Christ. Men are often strangely and confidently loquacious, where they might have learned of God to be silent.

But, Sergius Paulus, we hail thee, not as the first-fruits of the Gentiles, but as the first consular man who laid the fasces at the foot of the cross. Hear the enemy exclaim, "Tell it not in Rome, or at Jerusalem, that a patrician, a ruler of a province of the mighty empire, has believed in the crucified Nazarene." But "God has chosen the weak things to confound the mighty. For the weakness of God is stronger than men." Call a God manifest in the flesh, crucified for us, the weakness of God, if you will; yet is it not mightier than men? Could imperial Rome

have sent ambassadors, with power to strike blind those who withstood them? Could a prudent man, like Sergius Paulus, fail to say, “ ‘This is the finger of God!’ If Jesus has armed with such powers the apostles of the faith, though he died, he must, as they say, have laid down his life from the force of his own love, rather than the power of his enemies’ spite!”

But, now that a ruler of the earth is a convert to our faith, what is the consequence? The histories of mere men would have told of wondrous revolutions in the state; one dominant religion substituted for another; the altar of Venus thrown down, and that of Jesus erected on its ruins, and the might of Sergius employed to make Cyprus Christian. But of this, or anything like it, Luke says not a word. It is true, that Sergius Paulus was but a governor, subordinate to Cæsar; but we have seen Herod play the king, or the tyrant rather, under the emperor; and history proves how unscrupulously the Roman governors often contradicted, by their practice, the theory of subordination, knowing no will but their own. Much might Sergius Paulus have done in Cyprus, to make the inhabitants feel that their ruler was become a Christian; and much might Luke have said, to teach governors and kings that they should employ the power of the sword, as a talent entrusted to them, to subdue the world to Christ. Why is there not a syllable of this, in the first record of the conversion of one of the governors of the earth? Has silence no meaning? It speaks aloud; but who likes to hear?

Yet this very passage has been quoted in support of persecution. You look astonished, as well you may; not much less than when the Pope sanctifies his bloody sword, by quoting, “ Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.” But how can this narrative be adduced in defence of persecution? you ask. It is said, Paul blinded Elymas, as Peter killed Ananias and Sapphira. Neither Paul nor Peter did any such thing; but both taught us to leave to God judgment, which is his strange work. Had Paul, with his own hands, put out the eyes of Elymas, or Peter felled Ananias and Sapphira with a blow, there had been some parallel between apostles and persecutors; though, even then, we should have said to the latter, “ Work miracles of mercy too, and be not one-sided apostles—mighty for evil, and impotent for good.”

But Sergius Paulus was a sensible man, and, therefore, said, “ I see God has taken the cause of religion into his own keeping.

He that can smite with blindness, needs not the aid of my feeble arm. I will protect the state, and trust God with the care of the church."

Finally, the first instance in which an enemy to the Gospel was smitten with judgment, demands special study. The sin of seeking to turn men from the faith of Christ, is shown to be great; but greater, in proportion as men have had higher advantages, and are more convinced of the truth, so as to sacrifice their own convictions, and the everlasting interests of their fellow-creatures, to their love of power or of gain. Ah, beware, then, of closing your eyes to the light that shines around you; war not against your own convictions, speak not a word to turn men from the faith of Christ, lest God should punish the blindness of your mind by the loss of your eyes! Or, should he not thus repeat miracles of judgment on the body, he has another sword, "which pierces even to the soul." He can give you up to incurable blindness of heart, to be dark, not "for a season," but for ever. Then, hear the voice of Him who is the light of the world: "While you have the light, walk in the light, that you may be the children of the light; lest darkness come upon you." Imitate, not Elymas, but Sergius, "who believed, being struck with the doctrine of the Lord."

In Lecture the fifteenth, we have again the fall of the Jews contrasted with the rise of the Gentiles, whose apostle, Paul, sees an Israelite sorcerer struck blind, and a Roman governor illuminated with the doctrine of Christ.

LECTURE XVI.

THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL AT ANTIOCH, IN PISIDIA.

ACTS xiii. 13 to the end.

AMIDST many interesting events, we have lately heard little preaching ; but now we are invited to listen to a long discourse, which, however, will not, for several reasons, detain us a proportionate length of time.

The apostles' party having set sail from Paphos, where they left Elymas blinded, and Sergius enlightened, crossing the sea of Pamphylia, came to Perga, the first port on the continent of Europe. Here John Mark, having turned away from them, went back to Jerusalem, for reasons which Barnabas perhaps did not approve, and Paul could not but condemn. The two who had been sent forth by the Spirit from the capital of Syria, going up into the interior, about a hundred miles, came to another Antioch, (for there were sixteen of that name, but this was in Pisidia,) separated from Pamphylia by a part of the ridge of Mount Taurus. Here were many Jews, into whose synagogue they entered on the Sabbath day, which we should call Saturday, and sat down, probably, in the seat of the learned. After the reading of the law, which was divided into fifty-two sections, that the whole might be gone through in a year ; and of the prophets, divided, in a similar way, into the greater and the less, though Daniel is now excluded from the number ; the

rulers of the synagogue, observing the strangers, and concluding them to be Jews of some distinction, sent them a message, saying, "Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation to the people, speak." Let us first listen to the discourse, and then see the events to which it gave rise.

I. THIS DISCOURSE DEMANDS SPECIAL NOTICE, AS IT IS THE FIRST RECORDED SERMON OF THE APOSTLE PAUL. It consists of two parts :—

1. *The historical.* For, Paul rising, and having waved his hand, probably to induce those who had begun a movement to resume their seats, said: "Ye who are men of Israel, or, if not, men fearing God, hearken. The God of this people elected our fathers (Deut. vii. 6, 7), and exalted the people in their sojourn in the land of Egypt, and, with a high arm, brought them out of it; and, for the space of forty years, he fed them in the desert (Syriac). And having destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he allotted to them their land. And after these things, for about four hundred and fifty years, he gave judges, until Samuel the prophet; and then they asked a king (1 Samuel vii.), and God gave them Saul, the son of Kis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And, having removed him, he raised up to them David for a king, to whom also he spake, testifying, I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man according to my heart, who shall do all my will." (Psalm lxxxix. 20.)

For this historical introduction, the same reason may be assigned as prompted Stephen to a similar course,—the fondness of the Jews for their own history; (and what people had so much reason?) As this taste was not without its religious use, it might well be indulged, so far as to gain a favourable audience. But this history exhibited changes in the divine administration, the remembrance of which might prepare for the greater change now in progress. The grand reason, however, was the connexion of their history with that of the Messiah, whom the apostle was about to proclaim. The election of the fathers led the Jews back to the time when there was no distinction between them and Gentiles, which state of things the Gospel was about to restore.

The changes from slavery in Egypt to a pilgrimage in the

desert, and from a republic which lasted till the days of Samuel, when they would have a king, who was removed as a tyrant, all reminded them of the sins of their fathers. But the elevation of David, from keeping sheep, to filling the throne of Israel, taught them that the poverty of Jesus was no argument against his claims. As to David, whatever were the faults of the man, he was *a king* after God's heart; for he maintained the true religion, according to God's will. Of the chronology I say no more than that, reckoning the judges and tyrants, its accuracy has been shown, in answer to the objections of Christians and Jews. This compendium of Jewish history is a perfect example of compression.

2. *The evangelical, or theological, part of the discourse*, commences at verse 33. Having introduced David, the apostle says, "Of this man's seed has God, according to promise, raised up to Israel a Saviour, Jesus," whose name would, to Jewish ears, sound the same as Saviour. Jews loved to view Messiah as son of David, their hero-king; and Christ's royal descent Paul affirms, while there were opportunities for testing its truth. John having, before Christ's entrance, proclaimed a baptism of repentance, to all the people of Israel, showed what was the state of mind requisite to the acceptance of Messiah; while the forerunner, whom the nation revered as a prophet, was so far from claiming to himself the honour of Messiah, that he said, ere he fulfilled his course, "Whom do you suspect *me* to be? I am not he: but he cometh after me, whose shoes I am not worthy to loose."

"Men, brothers, sons of the race of Abraham, and those proselytes among you who are fearing God, to you is the word of this salvation sent;" that in Jesus there is a Saviour for you. For alas! those who are dwelling in Jerusalem, and their rulers, not having known him, and the voices of the prophets read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning him. "And having found no cause of death, they asked Pilate that he might be killed. But as they had fulfilled all things written of him, having taken him down from the cross, they laid him in a sepulchre. But God raised him from the dead. Who appeared, for many days, to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. We also tell you the good news, the promise made to the

fathers, that this hath God fulfilled to us, their children, having raised up Jesus. As also it is written in the second Psalm, 'Thou art my Son; to-day have I begotten thee.' But, because he raised him from the dead, no more about to return to corruption, he thus spake, 'I will give you the permanent benevolences of David.' Wherefore, also, in another, he saith, 'Thou wilt not permit thy Benevolent One to see corruption; for David, indeed, having in his own generation ministered to the counsel of God, fell asleep, and was gathered to his fathers, and saw corruption.' But he whom God raised, saw not corruption. Be it known, therefore, to you, brethren, that by this person is announced to you remission of sins, even from all from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses; by this person, every one who believeth is justified. See, therefore, lest there come upon you what is written in the prophets: Look, despisers, and wonder, and vanish; for a work I am working in your days,—a work which you will not believe, if one declare it to you."

Had my hearers been eye-witnesses of the calling of Paul, it would not have been necessary for me to say, Give profound attention to this, his first sermon on record. I entreat you, however, to observe that he here says not one word of his conversion. Yet, who would not have expected that he would tell the wondrous tale, and thus account to the Jews for his standing before them as an apostle of Jesus? Twice, he publicly related how Christ appeared to him; but he was then put upon his own trial, as "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes;" for which he gave this reason: that Jesus of Nazareth had appeared to him from the skies, vanquished his unbelief, and made him an apostle to the Gentiles. Now, he preaches Christ to the Jews, appealing to their own Scriptures, which demanded their faith, had there never been such a person as Paul. Overlook not the evidences of truth, which arise out of this conduct. Had he been a fanatic, fancying himself some wonderful person, to whom heaven granted miraculous visions and voices, he would have been too full of this to be able to pass it by unnoticed. His silence, therefore, tells aloud that he proved the truth of his religion, not by the extraordinary circumstances of his own conversion, but by the same evidences as demand every man's belief, the testimony of the inspired Scripture. To this, there-

fore, and not to his own history, he appeals, as every preacher should do, whatever may have been his experience. Miracles in ancient days, and remarkable providences or experiences in modern times, may be the occasion and the means of bending the attention, and bowing the heart; but the word of God is that which we believe to the saving of the soul.

Hence arises another object of special attention; the harmony, I had almost said, the identity, of this sermon of Paul, with the preaching of Peter, first, at Pentecost, and afterwards, before the Sanhedrim in Jerusalem. The same texts are quoted, and the same arguments employed, to prove that Jesus is the Christ. The same doctrine, also, is elicited, both for conviction and consolation; that Jesus was condemned and crucified, though innocent; but that God raised him from the dead that we might believe on him, and be justified, though guilty. "He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification."

But a few remarks, somewhat critical, demand attention, ere we close our study of this sermon. The conduct of the rulers at Jerusalem, though not condemned with bitterness, is censured, as betraying ignorance, not only of the Messiah, but also of the voices of the prophets, which the Jews read every Sabbath. Rulers of the church, listening to the best forms of worship, the reading of the Scriptures, and ignorant of their meaning, are fit for any mischief. But what a lesson was this to the synagogue at Antioch, who had just been reading the law and the prophets! Tremble, ye that hear the voices of the prophets and apostles, every Sabbath-day, in the church, lest ye also be ignorant of their testimony, and reject Christ, to whom they bear witness.

Thus Christ's enemies ignorantly accomplished all that was written of him. Oh, the wonders of that Providence which fulfils the Scriptures; not only by friends who love the Saviour and his word, but even by those who condemn themselves, while they justify him! The appearances of the risen Saviour to those who came up with him from Galilee, should be noticed as most convincing. For they best knew his person, and they are *now* his witnesses, says Paul; for this word, which Griesbach introduces into the text, is confirmed by the Syriac, and seems to distinguish Paul among the Gentiles, from those who

were still bearing witness in Judea. The resurrection of Christ is exhibited as the fulfilment of the grand promise made to the fathers, in the second Psalm: "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee!" Of the theological question, the import of the term, Son of God, I am not called to speak; but Paul teaches the Romans, in the epistle to them, that "Christ was *declared* to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead." The Scriptures, therefore, speak of things as beginning to be, when they are shown to be. The Father is said to have begotten the Son, on the day he raised him from the dead, and proved that it was not, as the Jews said, blasphemy, when he declared, "I am the Son of God." Of the sixteenth Psalm, I have spoken, when expounding the language of Peter, who showed that the words, "Thou wilt not suffer thy Benevolent One to see corruption," could not refer to David, but were a prophecy of Christ's return from the dead, before his body could know corruption.

But there is need of much consideration, to understand the quotation from Isaiah lv. 3: "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, the sure mercies of David." The Hebrew word signifies benevolences; and the Greek, which the apostles adopt from the Septuagint, was designed to express propensity of mind towards a person, which is an exercise of benevolence. As the word "mercy," was chosen by our translators, they felt obliged to change it for holy, in the next verse, where the original is the same. But, by preserving the idea of benevolence, or beneficence, we may render the verses thus: "I will give you the permanent benevolences of David; and thou wilt not suffer thy Benevolent One to see corruption."

But now it may naturally be asked, what has this quotation to do with the resurrection of Christ? I answer, the apostle had affirmed that Christ rose from the dead, not to return again to corruption, as some others who were raised; but to live and reign for ever. For this was promised by the prophecy, in which God said, "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, to give you the permanent beneficences of David." But when Isaiah spake this, David was dead, and therefore it could not apply to him personally; and when the apostle quoted it, the family of David had, for ages, ceased to reign; so that it could not refer to them. But Psalm lxxxix. speaks thus: "I will sing of the benevolence

of Jehovah, for ever. Benevolence shall be built up for ever, thy faithfulness wilt thou establish in the very heavens. I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn to David, my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations." Now, the perusal of the Psalm will show you a striking contrast between the magnificent promises of universality and perpetuity of the dominion of David, and the complaints of abandonment: "Thou hast made his glory to cease; thou hast made void the covenant, thou hast profaned his crown to the ground." It is only in Christ, David's promised seed, that the covenant can be shown fulfilled. By bringing *him* back from the dead, to die no more, but live and reign for ever, God shows that his covenant was everlasting, and the benevolences promised to David were permanent, durable for ever. Therefore, it is said, also, in the 16th Psalm, "Thou wilt not suffer thy Benevolent One to see corruption."

See, now, the grand truth elicited, justification by faith; the vital essence of the Gospel. "Be this known to you, that, through this person, is announced to you, forgiveness of sins." By the law of Moses they could not be justified; for there were some sins for which no offering was appointed, such as murder, and adultery, and idolatry; so that David says, "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it." Nor had any man perfectly kept the ceremonial, any more than the moral, law; "while the blood of bulls and of goats could never take away sin." But, through Christ, every believer is justified from all sin. This is the true apostolical preaching. I fear that Paul, seeing the pride of Pharisaic blood rise in opposition to this method of salvation, by grace, through faith, abruptly warned them, lest, in them, this should be fulfilled which is written in the prophets, alluding, some think, to the book of the prophets, but others think there is a reference to two prophets. Isaiah, who addresses the scornful men, called, by the apostle, "despisers;" and Habbakuk i. 5, "Behold, and wonder marvelously; for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you." It is worthy of notice that Isaiah prefaces the prediction of Christ as the foundation, with a warning to the scornful men; and Habbakuk says, "His soul, that is lifted up, is not upright, but the just by his faith, shall live."

II. THE EVENTS TO WHICH THE DISCOURSE GAVE RISE.
Ver. 42 to the end of the chapter.

There is a various reading, so well supported as to claim adoption; and, keeping this in view, we may observe that the immediate occurrences were delightful.

“They, *i.e.* Paul and Barnabas, going out (Griesbach), entreated that, on the next Sabbath, the same things should be spoken to them (again). But when the synagogue was dispersed, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who met this symptom of welcome reception to their message, by talking with them; so that “they persuaded them to adhere to the favour which God had shown to them.” Thus, while the whole synagogue were asked to hear, next week, some, as soon as the assembly broke up, followed the preachers, as attractive friends, and received the benefit of additional conversation, which seems to have been so persuasive that they were treated as converts, and exhorted to cleave to that favour which God had sent.

The events of the next Sabbath were of various complexion. Almost the whole city was collected, to hear the word of God. For though what occurs in a Jews’ synagogue produces little effect in a Gentile city, the conversation of the intermediate week seems to have awakened universal attention. To a Christian, what a delightful sight is a whole city flocking to hear the word of God! In others, however, it created opposite emotions, for who can stand before envy? The Jews, seeing the crowds, filled with jealousy of the new religion, contradicted what was said by Paul, not only while he was speaking, but afterwards blaspheming. Jews, too often, instead of arguing, merely contradict, and sometimes end by shocking us with their blasphemies against Jesus, whom they hate, and know that we love and adore. The Lord lay not their sin to their charge.

The casting away of the Jews was the recovery of the Gentiles. For the apostle and Barnabas, who had laboured in the patience of hope, on seeing the wicked spirit displayed in the synagogue, boldly said, “To you it was necessary for the word of God to be spoken first, for the Gospel is the power of God to salvation, to Jews first; but since you reject it, and adjudge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life; see, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord commanded us. I have placed thee for a light of Gentiles; for salvation to the extremity of the earth.” The careful

perusal of this prophecy, in its connexion, *as it stands in Isaiah xlix. 6*, will be more useful than any comment.

While the Jews seem to have heard their doom, without alarm; “the Gentiles, hearing of their succession to the lost heritage, rejoiced, and glorified the word of the Lord,” exclaiming, How gracious! how kind! how free! how unmerited the blessing which has come to us—salvation by Christ! “As many of them as were ordained to everlasting life, believed.” The new religion had become popular, almost the whole city flocking to hear; but only those who were ordained to eternal life, believed. For though faith cometh by hearing, it is not of ourselves, but is the gift of God; and if he gives it, it is to those whom he ordained to inherit eternal life by believing; and whom he predestinated, he called; and why attempt to explain away a blessing, without which we should neither believe nor have eternal life?

The word of the Lord was carried through all the region of Pisidia; for, once embraced in a city, it spread through the country. Thus the envy of the Jews was the more inflamed; for this was “turning to the Gentiles,” who were the inhabitants of the surrounding region. Women of the higher ranks of society, even queens, anciently saw the superiority of the Jews’ religion to that of the Gentiles, and became converts to a system, which raised them from the degradation and pollution of heathenism. The chief *men* of the city are not said to have been devout, or proselytes, but were probably influenced by the female proselytes, their wives, or sisters; so that the Jews unhappily succeeded, by inflaming the women, in raising a persecution against Paul and Barnabas. They had quitted the city, to bear their message through the country, from which they were now expelled. At the Lord’s command, “they shook off the dust of their feet, as a testimony against them, and went to the neighbouring city of Iconium.”

Thus were the Jews left in the awful state described by the apostle: “forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved; wrath is come upon them to the utmost.” “But the disciples of Jesus were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Oh, the joy, the peace of believing! “For, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. God gives his Holy Spirit to them that believe on his Son, and this fills them with all holy and happy tempers; so

that their "hope makes them not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts; by the Holy Ghost given to them."

You have here a specimen of apostolical preaching, in the first sermon which we hear from the lips of him that was miraculously called to be an apostle to us Gentiles. Observe, it is all full of Christ, who is proclaimed as promised in the Scriptures, which are largely quoted, appealing to the judgment and conscience of the hearers; and the doctrine of justification by faith is the conclusion, which men are warned to receive, lest they perish in their sins. One could almost say, that the whole was designed as an antidote to the modern pestilence, called Puseyism, which advises preachers to exercise reserve as to preaching Christ, denies the right or ability of men to judge of the meaning of Scripture, substitutes the works of the law for justification by faith, denounces, not those who reject, but those who embrace, this vital truth; and yet claims for itself the honour of being apostolical. But if, after seeing the contrast between the papistical heresy and the apostles' testimony, you abandon *this* for *that*, your blood will be upon your own head.

Against this new form of popery, more vile in proportion as it is less honest, less consistent, than the old, I warn you the more earnestly, because it has begun to advocate the principle of persecution, vainly attempted to be fathered on the apostles. Their meek spirit, which had appealed to the Scriptures, was rewarded by persecution, and expulsion over the borders. Yet the word of the Lord had made a lodgment in the capital, had spread through the country, had secured its triumphs; and the preachers fled, not because they had been defeated, but had done their work. Learn, then, at once to hate and to defy persecution.

But see how far the sacred historian is from being inflated with success; whole cities flocking to hear the word of God, or multitudes glorifying it as great and good; for he brings down the narrative to what some would call very moderate limits: "As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed." These were the grains of precious wheat amidst bushels of chaff. Yet that is well called, "precious faith," which lays hold of eternal life, and all else is false fire, or empty show. To the ordination of

God's love, we owe the faith of God's elect, as the Scriptures teach. For, after all the laborious discussions on these words, their true import must be learned from the usage of the sacred writers, especially Luke and Paul, the writer of this book, and the preacher of this sermon, which it contains, who teach us that the destination of sovereign grace is the original cause of our believing to salvation. Luke x. 21 ; Rom. viii. 29, 30.

Our sixteenth lecture records the commencement of those sermons which Paul was called to preach ; and, as it consists of comments on Scripture, so it exhibits the Jews as persecutors, and Gentiles as grafted into that stock, from which "the natural branches were broken off."

LECTURE XVII.

PAUL AND BARNABAS PERSECUTED, IDOLISED, AND RESTORED TO ANTIOCH.

ACTS xiv.

“BY honour and dishonour,” the twelve proved themselves apostles of Christ. It is difficult to say which is the severer test of character, but he who shines equally in both is worthy of our high esteem and imitation; for though affliction may fit us for exaltation, honour unfits us for degradation. Here we find Paul in each extreme; worshipped and stoned; winning disciples, and driven from city to city. At last, after founding churches, and leaving them to ordinary pastors, he returns, to gladden the mother church of the Gentiles, “declaring all that God had done by him to open the door of faith to a benighted world. Our attention will be directed—

I. To ICONIUM.

This capital of Lycaonia, was a place of note in the middle ages, as the seat of the Seljukian empire. It is now called Konieh. “Paul and Barnabas went both together,” we read; but, “according to custom,” the phrase may be interpreted. “The synagogue of the Jews” they entered; though they had shaken off the dust of their feet against them, in Pisidia; for no ill treatment in one place should prevent our efforts for another. “They

so spake, that a great multitude, both of Jews and Greeks, or Gentiles, believed," which rewarded their indomitable zeal, and their scrupulous obedience to the command to testify to the Jews first. If any suppose that they succeeded because they "so spake," as if their eloquence converted a multitude, let him remember, *first*, that they declared they were nothing, but that "whoever planted or watered, God gave the increase;" *next*, that he who so speaks that multitudes believe, owes it to the God who operates both on speakers and hearers. "A great many Jews and Gentiles," was a glorious harvest, on the first putting in of the sickle, and a soothing balm to those who had before, with anguish of heart, turned from Jews that "judged themselves unworthy of eternal life."

But, again, the unbelieving Jews excited and injured the minds of the Gentiles, or, as we should say, prejudiced them against the brethren, misrepresenting the characters and motives of the converts; so that, by causing them to be hated, others might be deterred from following their example. Thus, while "the remnant, according to the election of grace, at this time" was gathered in, the natural branches showed that they were being broken off. When it is said of the preachers, therefore, "they passed a considerable time, being bold in the Lord, who was testifying to the word of his grace," we learn that, on the one hand, they stayed to reap a fruitful field; and, on the other, to defend the accused converts against the calumny which these might not have been able to answer. It is a sacred duty to employ our superior advantages in defence of young disciples, who are assailed by crafty and malicious foes. Conscious of having become worthy of higher esteem and confidence, the neophyte is alarmed at the calumnies and prejudices to which he finds himself exposed; and we ought to prove to him that, if he has unreasonable enemies, he has also able and faithful friends. In this, the two missionaries were encouraged by their "Lord, who granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands;" though the miracles are not enumerated, as they would have been by any writer except one to whom miracles had become almost common. The grand object in Christ's view, was the word of grace, free pardon and salvation, through him who wrought miracles by men's hands, to set the seal of heaven on his own message; and, in spite of all the sneers of Deists, "miracles

are "signs to them that believe not" that God, who established the laws of nature, is bearing testimony to the revelation of his grace.

"But the multitude of the city was divided, and these were with the Jews," drinking in their slander; and those with the disciples, defending their doctrine. Our Lord warned us that he came not to bring peace upon earth. "There was, therefore, an assault made, both by Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers." But Hesychius considers the word which Luke employs, *ὁρμή*, as synonymous with a plot, to insult and stone them; and they, aware of it, fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra, and Derbe, and the surrounding region. To the force of argument, the Jews could oppose, only the argument of force, and, though they were anticipated, God will judge men for the crimes they would have committed if they could. Again, they did but scatter the fire which they hoped to quench; and, as they followed to Iconium, vexed at the reception of the word there also, they drove it on, from city to city, from region to region. Turn we, then,

II. TO LYSTRA. The apostles went thither, as the event showed, to be worshipped and stoned. Ver. 7.

"There they were telling glad tidings," though fleeing from city to city; for the joyous news never froze on their lips, since the benevolence and grace of their message still kept their hearts warm with holy zeal. But now we must see them in strange reverses,—the two extremes of honour and dishonour.

1. *See them worshipped as gods.* "For there was, at Lystra, now called Latik, some miles south of Iconium, a certain man, who, having no use of his feet, was sitting, lame from his mother's womb, so that he never had walked." Congenital lameness precludes all thought of imposture, as we have before seen. It is not said that he was a pauper, or that the preachers had gone into the synagogue, or any other building, and perhaps his infirmity had proved an advantage, by causing his friends to set him at his own door in that warm climate, so that he heard Paul preaching in the street. "He, looking at him, and having seen that he had faith to be healed, said, with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet." "The lame take the prey;" the cripple believed what the apostle preached; for the God that deprived him of feet to walk, gave him a heart to believe. This soon

spake through the eyes, and changed all the countenance ; which zealous preachers are quick to discern. Since, "to him that hath shall be given," and he believed that the God who saved him could heal him ; it was in effect said, as of old, "According to thy faith be it unto thee."

I have considered him as having faith, not merely to be healed, but to be saved, which is, indeed, the import of the original ; and the Syriac, instead of employing the word for healing, translates the passage, "faith to be saved," as if the apostle, seeing the man believed to the saving of the soul, wrought the miracle, not only to prove his mission, but to benefit a disciple of the Lord. The Greek word is often used, like "saved" in English, for healed, or recovered, and the reader must choose for himself ; though, in either case, the man must have believed the testimony of the apostle, who said, with a loud voice, to raise expectation, and to express his own assurance that the miracle would follow, "Stand upright on thy feet. He leaped up, and walked about," for the first time in his life. What an era in his existence, when he believed a proclamation of mercy to his soul, and found it sealed on his body, restored from a species of imprisonment to healthful locomotion ! The joyousness of the man, who found he could stand up, walk about, partake of the pleasure and healthfulness of exercise, and convey to those at a distance the tidings of his deliverance and his Saviour, should remind us of our obligations to God, who has, through our whole life, granted to us that which was so precious to him by whom it was newly acquired. Let not the mention of the apostle's "loud voice" pass unnoticed ; for here, and elsewhere, it is significant and important, as opposed to the low mystical muttering of the magical incantations of the heathen, who pretended there was a potent charm in certain words, which, not being heard, or understood, committed the thaumaturgist to nothing. But, by speaking plainly and aloud, the apostle pledged the faith of the God he served for the sequence of the miracle.

This was the first recorded prodigy of healing wrought by Paul, and as it was the first that had been seen in the heathen city of Lystra, the crowd lifted up their voices, saying, in the Lycaonian tongue, which was a sort of Assyrian Greek, "The Gods, transformed to the likeness of men, have descended to us." No new thought ; for we often meet with it in the Greek and

Roman classics ; and Homer is full of such fancies. Interpreting appearances according to their mythology, the people called Barnabas, "Jupiter ;" or, as the Syriac renders it, "The Lord of the gods." The person who appeared to them most like what they called Zeus, father of men and gods, must have been the more majestic. Hermes, or as we render it, after the Latin, Mercury, the god of eloquence, was the name they gave to Paul, as the leader of the discourse. Hermes was also deemed the son of Zeus, or Jupiter ; and Paul was, perhaps, young enough to appear the son of Barnabas. Observe, Luke, the companion of Paul, does not say they made *him* Jupiter.

Then, the priest of that Jupiter which was before their city ; that is, Zeus Propulos, called Poliouchos, tutelar, *i. e.*, guardian deity of the city, whose image was placed before their gate, having brought bulls and garlands to the gates, with the crowds wished to sacrifice. As Virgil calls the bull the chief victim, so it was offered to him they called Jupiter, king of the gods. The garlands of flowers adorned the head of the sacrificing priest and the horns of the victim. It has been doubted whether the gates to which these offerings were brought, were those of the city, or of Jupiter's temple, or of the house where the preachers were. I adopt the latter, not merely because this is clearly asserted by the Syriac ; but because the apostle was afterwards dragged out of the city, and therefore was, previously, not before the gates, but within the city. Besides, it was most natural to present the sacrifice to those who were deemed the present deities, and who had, probably, gone into the house, at the door of which they had healed the cripple, whose presence inflamed the superstitious zeal of the multitude.

I reluctantly yield to the necessity of turning from the story, to observe that the apostles are mentioned here, in the plural, and Barnabas is even made the first. But the Syriac has not the word apostle ; and, if it be genuine, there is, probably, a special reference to this journey, and to the express mission by the Holy Ghost, who said, "Separate to me Barnabas and Saul, to the work to which I have called them." Any one sent forth, is called an apostle, as, where we read of the messengers of the churches, the original has "the apostles of the churches."

To return to the two. They having heard, within the house, what was going on at the door, rent their garments, (which they never

did for their own sufferings,) in a paroxysm of indignation, and leaped out (*sic* Griesbach and Syriac) to the multitude, crying out and saying, "Sirs, why are you doing these things? and we are mortal men like yourselves!" This marked variation, though the reverse of being more literal, is more faithful than our authorised version, "men of like passions;" for as the ordinary sense of passion is violent temper, some have attempted to sanction their own unchristian passions by this text. There is, also, a technical or ecclesiastical sense, as when we read of Christ's passion, to the use of which I objected in the first Lecture. But there remains, too, a philosophical sense of passion, as equivalent to passivity, or liability to be acted upon, which belongs to creatures and not to God; and it is this which is expressed by the original word, "We are equally liable, with yourselves, to be acted upon by the elements, by sickness, blows, death." I, therefore, adopt the translation of the Latin Vulgate and of Luther, "We are mortals, men like yourselves;" "telling you good news, to turn from these vain things, to the living God, who made the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them, who, in past generations, left all the nations to go in their own ways. However, he left not himself unattested, doing good; from heaven, giving you rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness." It was, indeed, a happy message that called them from sacrificing to dead blocks or mortal men, to turn to the living God, the Creator of all things. Perhaps they plead: "Our fathers, for many generations, worshipped what you call vain things;" and the apostle says, "These were your own ways, and God, in just judgment, left you to go in them; though he still maintained a testimony to himself, by the works of creation, that sustain your life and proclaim the goodness of him who, alone, could thus bless you. Cicero, "On the Nature of the Gods," mentions these blessings of providence, but ascribes them to what he calls the immortal gods. A Greek epigram on the vine, says, that "gladness grows on it;" and some have supposed the apostle, by food and gladness, means food and wine. "Even saying these things, the two scarcely restrained the crowds from sacrificing to them:" for the people were unwilling to give up the thought that their gods had visited their city in human form.

See, here, the sincerity and sanctity of the apostles, of whom I will not say, they might have been worshipped, if they would,

but we may say they would not ; and thus they proved the purity of their zeal for the honour of the one living and true God, by showing, not less, but more, horror of idols, when those idols were themselves. Let no one say, this is nothing, for a creature, conscious of his infirmity and mortality, to refuse to be worshipped as a god. Alas ! we have painful evidence that it is something. For, not to mention the deification of emperors, one of our own countrymen, Captain Cook, suffered himself to be taken for Oro, the god of war, in the Sandwich Islands, and to be worshipped with idolatrous ceremonies, thinking it afforded a fortunate opportunity of swaying the savage mind. Alas ! the savages killed him whom they had adored.

But with no such shame and regret, as the conduct of our own navigator excites, we turn to

2. *See the apostle stoned as a criminal.* For the Jews from Antioch and Iconium came upon the Lystrans, and having so persuaded the crowds as completely to turn the current, and stoned Paul, they dragged him out of the city, thinking him to be dead. Thus the fickle multitude rushed from one extreme to the opposite ; and, having deemed the miracle wrought, the benefaction of a deity, so lost the sense of their obligation, as to reward it with cruel injury and intentional death. Alas ! Paul is still the butt of Jewish malice.

Now, see the multitude, with the priest at their head, leading up the victims to the gate of the apostle, as to the temple of a god ; hear them sing their sacred hymns to Zeus and Hermes, telling all the wonders they had wrought, and thanking them for the honour of this visit ! And, now, see the tide turned ; their passions rise, at being told their image was no deity, but mere vanity. Mark, how they listen to the Jewish calumnies against Paul. It may be thought a hard task, to bring men to stone what they had just adored ; but the apostles had helped on the change, by saying, “ We are no gods ; we are feeble mortals, like yourselves.”

See the body of the holy man, overwhelmed with stones, dragged through the streets of the city ; lying outside the gate as a corpse, surrounded by the mourning disciples, who here learned that the religion which they had adopted was that of the cross ; though it was proved by miracles of healing power. Alas ! they cry, shall those lips, that have just told us words

of life, so soon be closed in death. But, look again; he opens his eyes; he rises; he walks; he enters into the city, as if he had received no injury. Had there been a disposition to exaggerate, we should have been left to suppose he had been killed, and raised from the dead; but the contrary is intimated, though we are merely left to conjecture, that a miraculous restoration from the effects of the stoning, enabled him to go into the city again; which was a bold step, and must have awed the multitude, whose fickleness was once more displayed by leaving the apostle, at last, unassailed. Behold, now,

III. THE CIRCUIT HOMEWARDS, which was pursued in safety.

To Derbe, the neighbouring city, Paul went, with Barnabas, on the morrow, which showed his perfect recovery and unwearied zeal.

They were rewarded; for they not merely preached the Gospel in that city, but made a considerable number of disciples. He does not say, Christians, for Luke employs our Lord's term, "disciple," or "make disciples of all nations." Had they given way to despondency, at Lystra, they would not have enjoyed the delight of seeing numerous disciples at Derbe. But "they that sow in tears, shall reap in joy."

Thus cheered, they returned to face the foe again, and animate their converts at Lystra, and Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia; "strengthening the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith," notwithstanding all their persecutions. You have, perhaps, heard, if not, you will wonder, that this word, "confirming," has been caught at, to support the rite of confirmation; with which it has no more to do, than the same word has, when it occurs in the following chapter, verses 32, 41. The confirmation intended was this: that the apostles told the new disciples, they ought, instead of being alarmed at these persecutions, to make up their minds to such trials; for "through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God." To appeal to this text in defence of what is technically termed "confirmation," is to prop it up with a straw, and proclaim that it has no better support.

We are now conducted to an important event in the history of the church. Our authorised version of verse 23 runs thus: "And when they had ordained them elders in

every church, and had prayed, with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, in whom they believed." This is the first mention, and, as far as we can learn from Scripture, the first appointment of elders, or presbyters, by office ; for though we have met with the word before, it seems hitherto to have signified elders in years, or rather, perhaps, in standing as disciples, or members of the church.

In Jerusalem, and even through all Judea, the apostles seem at first to have been the only ministers of the word, which may have detained them in the holy land, to form models, that others might be "followers of the churches which in Judea were in Christ Jesus." In the apostles' absence, men endued with extraordinary gifts, though not appointed to office, appear to have ministered. We may almost say the same of the first Gentile church, at Antioch.

But now churches of the Gentiles were formed in distant parts, and, on revisiting them, Paul and Barnabas deem it necessary to set over them elders. As Clemens Romanus, the first of the Greek fathers, says, in his letter to the Corinthians, "The apostles appointed senior disciples, when proved, to be bishops and deacons of the churches." Mr. Ewing thinks the language of Luke elliptical, meaning, not that the apostle ordained persons to be elders by office, but elder disciples to be bishops. That presbyters, or elders, sometimes mean mere seniors, is certain ; and Luther seems so to understand the word here. But as elders mean, also, pastors, or bishops, in this book of the Acts (chap. xx.), and we have no mention of the first appointment of such officers, except in this passage, I am compelled to think that, not age, but office, is here intended.

These, our translators say, the apostles "ordained ;" but *χειροτονήσαντες* is the original word, which no Grecian would have understood in the sense conveyed by that English word. The Greek signifies election which is expressed by show of hands, or stretching them out. The correspondent word is quoted by Ewing, as thus employed in Xenophon's Anabasis, to express, not an ordination, but an election of military officers by the Greek army, in its celebrated retreat through this very region. It is with truth observed by Dr. Campbell, that the word occurs where no such election can be intended. But are words to lose their proper meaning because they are sometimes employed in a

less proper sense? Because Satan is called the god of this world, is God not the proper term for our Creator? It is true, also, that Paul and Barnabas are the immediate antecedent, which would make them the electors; but the more remote antecedent, "the disciples," may be referred to; though Luke may have designed to show, what, no doubt, was the fact, that the apostles concurred in the election, and held out their hands, along with the disciples, in favour of the elected elders. If the newly-formed churches best knew the men chosen, the apostles best knew the office, and the qualifications which it required.

But I argue in favour of an election, not merely from the fair, ordinary import of the word, which our translators have unfairly rendered "ordained;" but also from the manifest harmony of the proper sense with all that has preceded in this book. The hundred and twenty, mentioned in the first chapter, chose two, for the apostolate; and the twelve apostles said to the whole multitude, "Look out for yourselves," men fit to be deacons; and "they chose" those on whom the apostles "laid their hands," which may be called ordaining them, but is expressed by a different phrase. The very word, *χειροτονηθεις* is employed in 2 Cor. viii. 19, and is allowed by our translation to mean, "chosen" by the churches. Hesychius, and the Greeks in general, own that *χειροτονία* originally signified "election," and *χειροθεσία*, "ordination by laying on of hands." The churches are blamed for having evil teachers, which shows that they chose them; and it is notorious that the right of election was taken away when the corruption of the church made these elections scenes of blood.

On this occasion, they who made the election, not the apostles only, but the churches, prayed, with fasting, which properly accompanies so solemn an affair. The newly-appointed elders were commended, or set apart, to the Lord in whom they believed, and who "gave pastors and teachers for the work of the ministry."

Having crossed Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas came to Pamphylia, on the coast; and spoke the word in Perga, according to their intention when they merely passed through it at first. They came down to Atalia, which seems, by the similarity of name and position, to be the modern Adalia, though some say that a

neighbouring town of a different name is on the site of the ancient Atalia.

Finally, "they sailed thence to Antioch, in Syria, whence they had been commended to the favour of God for the work which they fulfilled." For, though that work was not specified, they seem to have understood all that they had done, since they left Antioch. This was a most important work, as it introduced the Gospel to a populous part of the Assyrian empire; and not only formed churches, but supplied them with pastors.

Arrived at Antioch, in Syria, they collected the church, and related whatever God had done with them, and that he had opened to the Gentiles a door of faith. Did they say nothing of the persecutions of the Jews? They could scarcely avoid it; but "write injuries in dust" was their motto, and they were delighted to tell that, to the Gentiles there was opened a door, into which they entered. This history is very much a record of the apostleship of him that was made a herald to the Gentiles. At Antioch, the mother church of the Gentiles, they passed no little time.

To us Gentiles it should be deeply interesting to see how the nations were turned from their ancient idols, to worship the living God. Nor should we fail to notice that it is of the essence of our religion to declare, at all hazards, even of life itself, war against idols. Let the sceptics sneer at our zeal for the destruction of the "elegant mythology of the Greeks;" Zeus and Hermes are still smitten with the apostolic sentence, "The things that the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God." Never let us rest, till the decree be fulfilled, "The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, shall perish from under the heavens, and from off the earth." "The idols he shall utterly abolish."

If, for the destruction of the false gods, and the honour of Jehovah, we are not willing to make the most costly sacrifices, the very Pagans will rise up in judgment and condemn us. I often blush for Christians, when I think of the expensive worship of idolaters. They lavished upon blocks what we grudge to the Infinite Spirit! When shall this reproach be wiped away? When shall we be willing to repay what we owe to missions which saved us from worshipping blocks or mortal men. This is life, "eternal life, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent!"

Where have we gone, among the heathen, and the Lord has not borne testimony to the word of his grace?

O ye that have not yet embraced the message of mercy brought to you, at such a price of labours, and sufferings, and blood, how will ye see, at Christ's right hand, the men who brought the Gospel to us Gentiles? Saved themselves, they longed for our salvation, and endured consuming toil, and braved dangers and death, that we might share their bliss. And will you meet them at that great day, to tell them, the proclamation which they brought, you despised?

Let those, who profess the faith of Christ, remember what they who introduced it to our isle told us of the tribulations we must endure. They had a right thus to speak, for they were not cowards exhorting others to courage, or the self-indulgent calling us to "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ;" but men who came from the battle-field, covered with scars.

We learn, here, what we owe to the apostles and first disciples of Christ. "In labours, and in perils, and in deaths oft," we find them, and we know well that no man could go through the world, attempting to overthrow the established religions, without exposing himself to hatred, scorn, and death. But none of these things moved Paul, while the offer of idolatrous worship threw him and Barnabas into agonies. They were willing to turn the tide against themselves, in order to preserve to God the honour due to him alone. This is the glory of the true Messiah, that he triumphed over the gods of Greece and Rome, while the Jews, who should have been zealous for the God of their fathers, stirred up idolaters against those who turned the world from the lying vanities of the heathen.

See how remote is Christianity from being a system of priestcraft. The institution of the ordinary ministry is thus recorded. They elected elders; praying, and fasting, and commending them to the Lord; and these, being placed over every church, or congregation of the faithful, had but a small sphere, and held each other in check against the spirit of domination. Whatever infamy has been brought on the Christian name, by popery, and its priestly domination over conscience, the Christian Scriptures are clear of all blame.

The Acts of the Apostles introduce us to churches; but the aim of a priesthood has been, to annihilate the churches, in order

to exalt the church. For an obvious reason. Had the churches remained as the apostles constituted them, each one would have been too feeble for domination over others. By merging the apostolical churches in a nondescript thing, of which the Scriptures know nothing, what is called the church of a nation, a body powerful for mischief was created, and the man of sin was seated in the temple of God. "The churches of the Gentiles," is the inspired phrase for those which Paul and Barnabas planted, and "the churches in Judea" is the language of Scripture, which expresses those previously formed in the Holy Land, though it was there, if any where, the several churches might have been expected to form one church.

All Christians, whether on earth or in heaven, form, indeed, one church; but they all come in one new and living way, through one high priest, into one most holy place, the Divine presence, and under the influence of one Spirit; so that it is said, "Ye are come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant."

Our seventeenth review of the progress we have made, exhibits the religion of Christ overleaping the boundaries of Palestine, and forming churches in Asia, where, alas! they no longer exist.

LECTURE XVIII.

THE EXEMPTION OF THE GENTILES FROM THE YOKE OF THE CEREMONIAL LAW.

ACTS xv. 1—35.

WHY are we assembled, this morning, to offer to God the spiritual, intellectual worship of prayer and praise, and to listen to the instructions of his word? Why are we not, to these exercises, adding a laborious and costly routine of bodily services, of a totally different genius? Or if, this day, the positive ordinances of the Gospel occur, why are they so few, and simple, and easy, as baptism and the Lord's Supper; instead of the shedding of the blood of bulls and of goats, and the burning of incense, and the performance of multitudinous rites? To all such questions, the answer is supplied by the chapter on which we enter? Need I say more to secure due attention? There is, however, another important reason, arising from what I think a common mistake; but I reserve the distinct mention of it to the end of the lecture, that I may leave your minds unbiassed, while we consider the occasion of discussing the grand theme of this chapter; the decision of the question at Jerusalem, and the occurrences which followed.

I. THE OCCASION WHICH AROSE AT ANTIOCH.

As Paul and Barnabas, on their return, "spent no *little* time" in this city, their leaving it is referred to in Galatians ii. 1:

“Then, fourteen years after, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also.” I reckon these fourteen years from Saul’s conversion; so that the events here recorded, occurred about the year 52, though it is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain the exact date.

The authors of the dispute, at Antioch, were certain persons, who, descending from Judea, taught the brethren, that “except ye be circumcised according to the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” These were professed Christians, like those who, when Peter returned to Jerusalem, after the conversion of Cornelius, accused him of “going in to men uncircumcised and eating with them.” But as it was then decided that Peter did right, these persons may not have been there; for, it is not said, that they came from Jerusalem, though from Judea. That they should have thus interfered, where Paul and Barnabas were, is surprising; but it should be recollected that there was a party that disputed the apostleship of Paul, and their zeal for the law created frequent disputes in the church. Though circumcision only is mentioned here; we find, from the fifth verse, that the litigious persons went on the principle, that “they who were circumcised were debtors to do the whole law.” The sequel shows that these troublers were but imperfectly informed, or established, in the doctrine of justification by faith alone; and were “men that perverted the minds of the disciples.” Ananias and Sapphira prove what we might, indeed, from the case of Judas, have expected; that there were some in the earliest churches, who, though struck with the miracles and other evidences of the Gospel, had no part or lot in its blessings, for “their hearts were not right in the sight of God.” It must, however, be admitted, that, as yet, no public declaration had been made of the incipient abrogation of the law of ceremonies, by exempting the Gentiles; for the conversion of Cornelius was somewhat private.

There being, therefore, no small disturbance and dispute, with Paul and Barnabas, against these troublers, it was arranged that Paul and Barnabas, and some others from among the Antiochians, should go up to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem, concerning this question.

Coming from the land of the Jews, where the law of Moses was still observed by the generality of the Christians, the

disturbers represented the conduct adopted at Antioch, as a Gentile schism, and, therefore, the question was referred to the mother church, as if it were said to the Gentile converts, "What! went the word of God out from you? or came it to you only?" All that Paul and Barnabas could say, concerning the decision on the case of Cornelius, and the testimony which God had borne to the Gentiles who believed, availed not; and, therefore, the whole question was referred to Jerusalem, where apostles still remained, and the elder disciples of Christ were to be found. To settle this important point, Paul says, "I went up by revelation."

To this, no valid objection can arise from its being said they were "sent forth by the church;" which, being informed of the Divine will, was anxious to express its concurrence, by sending the deputation, and waiting for the ultimate decision. As these went along the shore, they passed through Phenicia and Samaria, narrating the conversion of the Gentiles. There were so many striking and delightful occurrences to tell concerning Paphos, and Iconium, and Lystra, that great joy was afforded to all the brethren. For, as "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth," the conversion of many Gentile idolaters, and the formation of Christian churches, not only gave promise of happy days to their country, but filled every believer, who heard the news, with joy, at the display of divine mercy in the victories of the truth.

II. THE DECISION OF THE QUESTION AT JERUSALEM. Ver. 4.

By this joyous march, having arrived at its destination, the embassy from Antioch, received by the church, and the apostles, and elders, at Jerusalem, related whatever God had done with them. The church is mentioned first, as if it was called together, to give a meeting to those who were highly esteemed, and had much to tell, as well as an important decision to ask. But the apostles and elders seem to have been convened separately, also, at the request of Paul, who says to the Galatians, "Fourteen years after, I went up to Jerusalem, with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also; and I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that Gospel which I preach among the Gentiles; but privately, to them who were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run in vain."

1. *The introduction of the question.* Several meetings appear to have been held, as was natural; some more general, others more select; and in one of the former kind, there were certain of the sect of the Pharisees, who had believed, saying of the Gentile converts, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and command them to keep the law of Moses;" *i. e.*, the Gentiles must, in addition to believing in Jesus, become complete Jews, in order to be real Christians. Observe, that the question, whether Jews, by birth and education, should, after they believed in Jesus, *continue* to keep the law of Moses, was not touched here, except incidentally. The persons who now, as before at Antioch, insisted on the necessity of enforcing upon the Gentiles the observance of the law, seem to have done it contentiously, both in public and private: determined to have their own way; not because they thought it the will of God, but because their Jewish prejudices would not allow them to think of anything else.

2. *The solemn meeting for discussion.* "The apostles and elders were assembled to see concerning this affair." If this was the private meeting with those of reputation, they must have admitted to it some others, who caused it to be said, "There was dispute, or discussion;" for it does not appear that there was any doubt, or difference of opinion, among the leaders of the church; Barnabas agreeing with Paul, and Peter having acted in the same way at the house of Cornelius, and the church having approved. Hear, now, the first speaker.

Peter, therefore, to whom the keys had been committed, having risen in this meeting, said to them, "My brothers, you know that, from ancient days, God, among us, chose that the Gentiles, by my mouth, should hear the word of the Gospel and believe." Our translators say, "a good while ago," which is not sufficient to express what I have rendered literally. As I cannot think that Peter affirms the conversion of Cornelius to have happened a long while ago, so Lightfoot supposes that Peter looks farther back, to Christ's choosing him to use the keys, and open the door of faith to the Gentiles. But does not the apostle refer to the choice of God, from the days of eternity, to call the Gentiles by the ministry of Peter? For this accords with what James says of the works of God, known from eternity. God chose the Gentiles to believe, as well as to hear; and chose the man by whose mouth the word should be uttered; for many

events show an election of the instruments, as well as the subjects, of conversion.

“And God, the heart-knower, bore witness to them, giving to them the Holy Spirit, as also to us ; and in nothing distinguished between us and them, having, by the faith, purified their hearts.” Pause and meditate profoundly on the import and spirit of these words. God’s knowledge of the heart is introduced to show that the Gentiles, who heard Peter in the house of Cornelius, though uncircumcised, unconformed to the law of Moses, were accepted, as believers in Jesus ; for God attested this, by giving them the Holy Spirit, who descended on them, as on the hundred and twenty, at Pentecost, enabling the converted Gentiles at Cesarea to speak with tongues, just as the others, at Pentecost. This is assumed to be a proof that there was no difference in their acceptance before God, who would not have given this attestation to the guilty. They were not separated by circumcision, or purified, as to the flesh, by the blood of bulls, and goats, and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean ; but God, by the faith which he chose they should possess, purified their hearts. This, proving that they should be saved, for the pure in heart shall see God, gave them a title to full communion with the church, which saw that faith in Christ sanctifies all those who, through it, are justified. Hear it, ye of the sect of the Pharisees, who tell men, “except ye keep a law of ceremonies, ye cannot be saved !”

Now, therefore, why tempt ye God, to put a yoke on the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we ourselves have been able to bear ? To tempt God is, according to Scripture, to make experiments upon his power and will, to try whether he can be induced to do something which we wish to be done. Here, it means, to try whether God can be brought to put the yoke of the ceremonial law on the neck of the disciples, converted to Christ from among the Gentiles. The Jews still speak of the *yoke* of the law, and Paul says to the Galatians, “Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free, and be not entangled in the yoke of bondage,” which Peter here shows is unbearable. For by it they were “shut up to the faith,” and taught to long for the coming of Christ, by faith in whom they had all their hope and peace, whether you look back to the ancient fathers, or to the first believers in Jesus. “No man

kept the law," which was added, "because of transgressions, that the offence might abound," and that they might, instead of attempting to impose it on the Gentiles, to whom it was never given, welcome the truth which Peter now adds.

"But, through the grace of the Lord Jesus, we believe, to be saved; in like manner as they also." This more literal version, which is more accordant with the Syriac, may awaken consideration, whether it is not the design of Peter to say, that, through the grace, or favour of Christ, we have been brought to believe, in order to be saved; just as they, the fathers, who were not able to bear the yoke, so as to be saved by it. The difference between this and the common version is not great, and the radical idea of the way of salvation is the same; but Peter seems not to say, he believed Christians would be saved, but that it was through Christ's grace they believed unto salvation; when the yoke of the law was too heavy to afford them hope that they had adequately borne it; though the Pharisaic professors said, "Except ye keep it, ye cannot be saved." But there is great beauty and force in this declaration, that, instead of attempting to make Gentile believers like Jews, under the yoke of the law for salvation, all real believers among the Jews had obtained grace from Christ to believe in him alone for salvation; just as the Gentiles, who had never received the law. Verily, the Jews' pride of self-righteousness was prostrated at the foot of the cross! Here I follow Calvin, who thinks that as the "fathers" are the immediate antecedent, they are said to be saved by Christ, when they could not bear the yoke of the law so as to be saved by it.

This mention of Gentiles believing to salvation, called up Paul and Barnabas; and all the multitude (which, perhaps, was now introduced so that what had been a more select became a general meeting,) kept silence, and heard them explaining whatever signs and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. This, which we have already considered, must have been at once interesting and convincing.

3. *The speech of the apostle James.* But, after they were silent, came James, not the brother of John, but another apostle, the son of Alphæus, called James the Less, who seems to have remained most constantly at Jerusalem, as an apostolic witness to Judea. He said: "Brethren, hearken to me. Simeon

Peter has explained how, at first, God looked out, to take from Gentiles, a people for his name; and to this agree the words of the prophets, as it is written, After these things I will turn again, and built up the tabernacle of David, that was fallen, and will build up its ruins, and set them upright, that the remainder of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles, on whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth these things, known from eternity. Wherefore, I decide not to trouble those who, from the Gentiles, turn to God; but to send to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols, and from the fornication, and the things strangled, and the blood. For Moses, from ancient generations, in each city, has those who are preaching him in the synagogues, being read every Sabbath."

James seems here to refer to God's eternal purpose, as Peter to the days of eternity; God, from the first, having looked out for this event, though it now took the church by surprise. The prophecy quoted, is found in Amos ix. 11, 12, which I leave to Dr. Henderson, the best modern translator of the minor prophets; merely observing, that, whatever objection is made by Jewish critics to the apostle's quotation, falls also on their own Greek translation. The New Testament agrees generally with the Septuagint, while preserving the true import of the Hebrew. I may observe, also, that James refers to prophets in the plural, and, though he specifies one, gives the *sense*, rather than the *letter*; as the design of the prophecy is to show, that, after the judgments which God threatened to the rebellious Jews, he would restore David's kingdom, which had been as a booth blown down. The coming of the Messiah, whom the rabbis call the son of the fallen, had been frequently promised, under the figure of the restoration of David's empire; and here the rest of the world, intended, perhaps, by Edom, which occurs in Amos, and which the Jews often put for the Gentiles, are said to be joined to that empire, which consists of all on whom the name is called, or who are called the people of Jehovah. All this applies to the calling of the Gentiles to be the people of God, without incorporating them with the Jews under the Mosaic law.

James, therefore, decides against troubling them with this imposition of the intolerable yoke, and advises to write to them to abstain from what are justly called, the pollutions of idols;

or, as Paul expresses it, abominable idolatries; among which were sexual pollutions, sanctified by heathenism, but condemned by Christ. As this was moral defilement, it is easy to see why the Gentiles were charged to guard against it, which abounded in their country. The two following things, however, have created great difficulty, which a world of discussion has not removed. I am inclined to think that the things strangled, mean living creatures, killed by cruel, superstitious modes, for idolatrous reasons. But some think they signify meats offered to idols, and eaten at the idol-feasts in their temples, where all abominations abounded.

The blood was that of *living* animals, or what was drunk in idolatrous feasts. Thus all the unchaste and cruel practices of the Gentiles were prohibited. The reason given, that Moses was read in the synagogues, seems designed to teach the Gentile converts, that, though they were not called to submit to the law of ceremonies, they should avoid shocking the Jews; and, therefore, watch against everything contrary to sexual purity and to humanity, and against whatever the ancient Scriptures condemned as in itself vicious, which was equally abhorrent from the genius of the Christian religion. As to that eating of blood, which some practice among us; if it was designed to be prohibited here, Paul would not afterwards have said, "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused;" though it was still evil, if eaten when it would give offence to those who had not this knowledge; while he that is strong "believeth that he may eat all things." The fathers deemed three things prohibited: idolatry, homicide, and fornication.

"Known to God are all his works, from the beginning of the world, or eternity," which closes the speech of James, is, on considerable manuscript authority, altered to, "saith the Lord, who doeth these things, known from eternity." The ancient prophecies prove that God foresaw the calling of the Gentiles, and provided for it, by such declarations as afforded a guide to the conduct of Christians, when the event should occur.

4. *It, then, seemed fit to the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to act accordingly.* For there was a perfect harmony, when the mind of the Spirit in the Scriptures had been unfolded by the apostles; Peter having shown the import of God's conduct in sending him to Cornelius, by which the keys of the kingdom

entrusted to him were employed to open the door of faith to the Gentiles ; and James, who presided specially over the church at Jerusalem, to which the appeal had been made from Antioch, having given his concurrent advice. The elders, or senior disciples, who had known the complete Christian history, expressed their approbation, and the whole church, which was the mother of all others, concurred.

As representatives of the elders and the church, it was determined to send back to Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas, and the others who had accompanied them, certain men of their own, Judas, or Jude, called Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, by their hands conveying these words which follow.

5. *The apostolic letter.* “ The apostles, and the elders, and the brethren, to those brethren in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia, who are from the Gentiles ; send greeting. Since we have heard that, from us some, having gone out, have troubled you with speeches, disturbing your souls, telling you to be circumcised and to keep the law, to whom we have not given the charge ; it has seemed fit to us, being harmonious, to send chosen men to you, with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have resigned their souls for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ : we have sent, therefore, Judas and Silas also, themselves, by word, announcing the same things. For it has seemed fit to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to impose no more burthen on you than these necessary things, to abstain from idol sacrifices, and blood, and what is strangled, and fornication ; from which guarding yourselves, you will act well. Fare ye well.”

See, here, the first apostolical epistle. The elders and the brethren are joined with the apostles, in a spirit the very opposite to that which the pretended successors to the apostles have displayed. The letter is sent to the converted Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia ; because they only had yet been troubled by the Pharisees, who afterwards disturbed other churches, especially those of Galatia. The disturbers, having come from Judea, may have been presumed to have had their orders from Jerusalem ; perhaps they said so. The letter assured the Gentile converts that no commands were given to be circumcised, and keep the law. The brethren from the church at Jerusalem are made of great importance, as sent to confirm the testimony of the letter, by word of mouth ; and the honourable mention of Paul and

Barnabas was an antidote to the affront given to their ministry by the opposition of the Pharisees, whom Paul calls "false brethren, unawares brought in, to spy out our liberty which we have by Christ Jesus."

Special consideration is due to the words, "It has seemed fit to the Holy Spirit, and to us." However, the Pharisaic party, or false brethren, may have disputed, Paul and Barnabas from the first withstood them; and Peter was taught immediately, by the Spirit, to call no man unclean, but to go in to men of another nation, and when this was censured at Jerusalem, his account of the Divine revelation caused the whole church to acquiesce. The disciples at Jerusalem had sent Barnabas, to aid the reception of the Gentiles at Antioch, and in this conference both Peter and James declared that the Gentiles were accepted by faith, without the law, and in the same way the apostles themselves decide. They argued, also, from Scripture, that the Spirit had previously revealed the same thing, and, therefore, they knew, both by a special influence peculiar to apostles, and by the Scriptures inspired for all, that they were giving, in this epistle, the decision of the Holy Spirit. As all had agreed in this, they might say it has seemed proper to *us*, who were thus taught by the Spirit. Instead, therefore, of the whole weight of the law, they lay on the Gentile believers no other burthen than these things pronounced necessary, which the letter expresses the more compendiously, because it was to be accompanied by verbal explanations, and, perhaps, the very words, idol-sacrifices, and blood, and what is strangled, and fornication, were better understood at the time to which these cautionary precepts were intended to apply. The letter answered its end; for they, to whom it was sent, well understood it; which is more than I can positively say of myself, or of any of the commentators.

III. THE CONSEQUENT EVENTS.

1. *The return of the deputation.* They, therefore, being dismissed, came to Antioch, where the disciples must have waited, with some solicitude, for the decision of a question which affected the whole of their future walk. Having collected the multitude, or whole body of the church, which we find, from Scripture, and the earliest fathers, was convened and consulted, on all occasions, the four persons to whom it was

entrusted delivered the letter, which implies that some of the Antiochian disciples took, and having read it, they, of that church, rejoiced at the exhortation. They had, indeed, great reason, as all who know how heavy was the yoke of the law must admit. As to the necessary things to which they were exhorted, these must have been joyfully obeyed by all who abhorred idols, cultivated chastity, and were tender towards the Jews who believed.

2. *The conduct of the deputation from the church at Jerusalem.* Judas and Silas, being themselves prophets, by a gift of foretelling future events, or of expounding prophecy, or of ordinary preaching; by much discourse, exhorted the brethren and strengthened them. The word "confirmed" occurs in our translation, but has manifestly no reference to the modern rite of confirmation. The wisdom of sending two prophets is evident; for, after the disturbance created by men from Judea, the Gentiles needed to be cheered and fortified by preachers from Jerusalem, who satisfied the new converts, that, though non-conformists to the law, they were in perfect fellowship with those Jews who may have still kept the law, as permitted, though not required.

After some delay, they were dismissed, with peace, from the brethren, to those who sent them, having happily accomplished their object. But it would seem that others, not mentioned in the letter, were included; for while it is said *they* were dismissed, Silas thought fit to remain there, as a desirable field of usefulness. "Paul, also, and Barnabas, delayed in Antioch, teaching and declaring the glad tidings of the word of the Lord, with many others," whom we must suppose to have accompanied them from Jerusalem.

I must now enter upon a theme, at which I hinted, on commencing the lecture. For this, which has been called the Council of Jerusalem, has been assumed as a model, for what are called councils in the Christian church, and as the grand charter of presbyterianism, or the government of the churches by presbyters, or pastors, gathered from several congregations, to issue authoritative decrees. I can see nothing but a voluntary reference from a newly-formed church, to the apostles, which would be equivalent to an appeal, in our case, to the Scriptures, where the apostles "sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

If others than the apostles are appealed to, here, they are not the collective body of the office-bearers of surrounding churches; but the elder disciples, and the whole church at Jerusalem, who, as being under the immediate care of the apostles, were the fittest witnesses to the apostolic doctrine. For this was the question to be decided: What is the true Christian doctrine of the obligation of Gentile converts to keep the law, which Moses gave to the Jews? The false brethren said, "Except they kept the law, they could not be saved." Paul and Barnabas said, they would be saved "by faith in Christ, without the deeds of the law." As the false teachers came from Judea, it was determined to send to the apostles, who were there. They decided that the doctrine of Paul and Barnabas was true; and the elders and all the brethren concurred, and sent two of their number to declare this verbally to the Gentiles. By what magic have men evoked, from this meeting, the divine authority of kirk-sessions, presbyteries, synods, and general assemblies? On the part of those at Antioch, this was a voluntary appeal, to ascertain a fact, Paul's agreement with the other apostles. If we are called to imitate them, we ask, Where are the apostles to whom we may appeal? And do they, who urge this example, themselves imitate it, by uniting with them the whole church, where the synod is held, and by issuing decrees in their name? As far as this extraordinary affair can be made a rule in ordinary cases; it proves no more, than that a single church, when agitated with disputes, would do well to ask counsel of another, whose longer standing may have furnished it with better information.

There were no representatives of the other churches in Judea sent to Jerusalem. I have said nothing of other systems beside the presbyterian; but any government by officers, without the church, or body of the faithful, in vain seeks support from this chapter. Some have impiously assumed the right to adopt the style of the apostolic letter, and say, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us." But let him that claims the rights of an apostle, show his inspiration, by miracles. With all their profane mimicry, can they say, "The apostles, and elders, and *brethren*, send greeting"? As to what are called general councils, they are mockeries; and, in the last, held at Trent, fifty, out of thousands called bishops in the earth, fifty decided a question of importance; while these were mere puppets, moved as the

Pope pulled the strings. Very early, Gregory Nazianzen complained that no council had a good result. That of Trent was intended, by the original movers, for reformation; but by the artifices of the popes, completed the apostasy. Who will see another general council?

The theme of this chapter is of the utmost importance to all, but especially to us Gentiles. Life and death are in it. It is true that the law, of which it speaks, is not the moral law, or rule of universal holiness; but the ceremonial, which Moses gave to the Jews; and, therefore, the discussion could not prove more than that we are not bound to become Jews in order to be saved; were it not that certain principles are here asserted, which decide the whole question of our justification before God. For it would have been very natural, and even necessary, if there were any truth in what some say, that, though we are not justified by the works of the ceremonial law, we *are* by those of the moral, that this should be taught in what is called the council of Jerusalem. Yet, not only is there no hint of such a distinction, but there are such things said as sweep it entirely away. All works are excluded, that grace may be established. "God put no difference between us and the Gentiles," says Peter, "purifying their hearts by faith." "We, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, believe to be saved, even as they." Instead of sending a letter to tell the Gentiles, that, though they were not bound to keep the ceremonial, they must keep the moral law, in order to be justified, or saved,—the letter treats them as accepted through faith, and charges them to guard against certain things which would shock those who hear the ceremonial law of Moses, read every Sabbath, in the synagogue.

Let it not surprise the hearers of these Lectures, if I invite them to take their farewell of Peter, for this is the last time he appears in the inspired history. We shall not again meet even with his name. He has employed the two keys of the kingdom of heaven, with which he was entrusted, to open the door of faith to the Jews and to the Gentiles, and now he disappears. We meet with two of his letters, in the inspired code, but where they were written we know not. The only definite place in which we gain a glimpse of him is—not Rome—but Antioch, where Paul exhibits him, in the letter to the Galatians; which speaks thus: (ii. 11—16.) Read the passage, in your own abode.

The importance of the church at Antioch seems to have induced Peter to visit it, after the meeting at Jerusalem, and to have mingled with the Gentiles, on the principle which the Spirit taught him, that "what God had cleansed, no man should treat as unclean." But, while there, other disciples came from James, who remained at Jerusalem, when the rest of the apostles were dispersed over the world; and these new-comers being weak, and prejudiced against intercourse with the Gentiles, Peter, to avoid giving offence to weak brethren, withdrew from the intercourse which he had held with the Gentiles. This induced the other Jews to do the same, and Barnabas was carried away with what Paul calls dissimulation; because it was contrary to their own convictions of what was allowable, though not done to deceive, but to avoid offence to weak brethren, which, in certain circumstances, Paul declares to be the proof of Christian charity. But here, he thought it injurious, as virtually compelling the Gentiles to live as Jews, that they might not be cut off from the society of their Jewish brethren. He, therefore, publicly declared that Peter was to blame; for, though infallible and harmonious in doctrine, in conduct we know that the apostles were holy men, but not impeccable. Peter is not said to have replied, and he, doubtless, assented, and altered his course.

He appears to have come to Antioch, on his way to the further east, where he preached to the "strangers scattered abroad throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia," who were Jews by descent, but, having received the Gospel, were afterwards addressed by him as elect, in two letters, the last, written when he was "about to put off the tabernacle by martyrdom, as the Lord Jesus showed him," saying, "When thou shalt be old, another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not."

You will perceive that I consider the ministry of Peter as devoted to the Jews, just as that of Paul was to the Gentiles; for, though the latter never failed to seek the salvation of his countrymen, yet when he would have laboured at Jerusalem, thinking his ancient enmity to Jesus would now turn to the advantage of his ministry to the Jews, he was told by his Lord, to "depart, for they will not receive thy testimony here: I will send thee far hence to the Gentiles." Peter, on the other hand, came to Antioch, but he was chiefly among the believing Jews;

“and when they saw that the Gospel of the circumcision was committed to Paul, as that of the circumcision was to Peter, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas, that these should go to the heathen and those to the circumcision.” Paul, therefore, we know, both wrote and went to Rome, the head of the Gentile world; and, Peter, as far as the testimony of Scripture can decide, ministered to the Jews, and neither wrote nor preached to Rome. The Romanists, indeed, affirm that he went there early. But we have already traced the history of the church beyond the fiftieth year, and no mortal would suppose Peter had yet been at Rome, or beyond the limits of Judea. Some Protestants think that the tradition of Peter’s visit to Rome never could have prevailed, if he had never been there. But a thousand traditions have been received which are contrary to reason and to Scripture. Their origin is in the clouds, and their witnesses are all too late to be of any worth. Peter’s mission to Rome, as now told there, is not only extra-scriptural, but anti-scriptural; and when he is said to have been there, we are led by the Scriptures to conclude he was elsewhere.

Who can suppose that the New Testament should be silent about Peter’s becoming Bishop of Rome, if this was to constitute Rome an apostolic see, head of the Christian church? The fathers, by an apostolic see, understood a church founded by an apostle; and neither Scripture nor ecclesiastical history leads to the conclusion that the church at Rome was founded by an apostle.

May I not say that we have, this day, read the first epistle of the apostles? It is, indeed, wrought into the history, instead of standing alone, as those which we are accustomed to call the apostolical epistles; but it furnishes a hint of that mode of divine revelation to which the Acts were a necessary introduction.

This eighteenth Lecture has been prolonged by the importance of its theme, the complete justification of believers in Christ, the purification of their hearts by faith, without the observance of the law of ceremonies. “Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

LECTURE XIX.

THE ENTRANCE OF THE GOSPEL INTO EUROPE.

ACTS xv. 36 to the end of chapter xvi.

WE, who were lately delighted to see the cloud of the divine presence, which moved from the Jews when they shed the blood of Stephen, direct its course towards us Gentiles, may now indulge in new delights; for, lo, the cloud, which at first proceeded no further than Samaria, midway between Jews and Gentiles, having advanced to shed its glory on the Gentile city of Antioch, is crossing over from Asia to Europe, where we dwell. The cradle of the human race, of arts, and of religion, was Asia; but Europe, destined to be the ruling quarter, had already displayed its mental superiority in Greece, and now swayed the sceptre of physical power at Rome. But no apostle of the Lamb had visited this quarter, till Paul came over to Macedonia. Apostle of the Gentiles, how beautiful are thy feet upon our shores! The principal event was preceded by

I. THE PARTING OF PAUL AND BARNABAS, TO LABOUR IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS.

“After some days,” Paul said to Barnabas, “let us return and inspect the brethren, through every city in which we have announced the word of the Lord; to see how they are.” Having found that the church at Antioch was, even in their presence,

disturbed by false teachers ; and knowing, by experience, what persecutions the Jews excited against the early converts ; love made the teachers anxious about the newly-formed churches. For religion is, in this world, an exotic plant, hard to rear, and exposed to blights. Barnabas evidently consented, but advised to take with them again his sister's son John, called Mark ; and Paul thought it not proper to take him, that " departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work ;" deeming such conduct a mark of fickleness, cowardice, or indolence, unbecoming an attendant of the apostles ; while Barnabas either saw reasons that justified Mark's former conduct, or considered him now improved ; for the partiality of relationship may have swayed the good man's judgment. There was, therefore, a " paroxysm," or excitement ; though there may have been no anger, and nothing more than keen dispute, arising from a decided difference of opinion. The ancients say ; Paul contended for what was just, and Barnabas for what was kind. They parted ; but it was as Abraham and Lot, saying, " If you take the right hand, I will take the left."

If Barnabas was too partial to his nephew, and Paul too strict with the youth, it is pleasant to see how Paul afterwards honoured Barnabas ; but when we hear the former say to Timothy, " Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry," I am inclined to think this was the person whom Peter calls " Marcus, my son," and not the nephew of Barnabas. The things which happened here turned to the furtherance of the Gospel ; and, instead of two primaries moving together, we see each of them attracting a secondary, withdraw from the other, to shine on different realms. Barnabas, taking John Mark, sailed westward to Cyprus, his native isle.

II. THE SEPARATE LABOURS OF PAUL, are now our theme.

Having chosen Silas, who is often called Sylvanus, and who had come with him from Jerusalem to Antioch, Paul was commended to the favour of God by the brethren ; which has been considered a proof that they espoused Paul's part in the dispute, though his more arduous undertaking might be the only reason for special prayer on his behalf. He passed

through the contiguous countries of Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches which had been planted in these regions.

They came down to Derbe and Lystra—the third visit Paul paid to the latter place, where he had been worshipped and stoned; and there our attention is roused by this saying, “*Behold*, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, son of a woman (called Eunice, 2 Tim. i. 2) a believing Jewess, but of a Greek father, who had the favourable testimony of the brethren that were in Lystra and Iconium;” as every young man who enters the ministry should have a good report. The excellence of this *youth*, as Paul afterwards calls him, we know; and, therefore, are not surprised that the apostle wished him to go forth with him. But as his mother was a Jewess, and he, probably, had embraced her religion, before either of them became Christians, he might be claimed as a Jew, to whom it was permitted to observe the law of Moses. Paul, therefore, took and circumcised him, on account of the Jews that were in those parts; for they all knew his father, that he was a Greek, and they would not have received the son, if he had not submitted to the law, but would have condemned Paul for being attended by one who seemed to adopt the religion of the Gentile father, rather than that of the Jewish mother. This act of Paul’s has been condemned as hypocrisy and inconsistency; but he had shown decision enough in “not suffering Titus, who was by both parents a Gentile, to be circumcised, giving place, not for a moment, to the false brethren privily brought in, to spy out the liberty given by Christ.” For these spies would have imposed the law on the Gentiles; to whom it never was given, believing it necessary to salvation, which was contrary to the truth of the Gospel—that salvation is by grace, through faith in Christ. In the case of Titus, therefore, circumcision was resisted, as a virtual renunciation of evangelical grace. But when one who might be considered as a Jew, submitted to circumcision, for the sake of usefulness among Jews, the rite was treated as a thing indifferent; “for, in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision, availeth anything.” So much depends upon motive, which gives to actions their character. Be it remembered that the decision of the apostles, at Jerusalem, applied only to the Gentile converts, to whom alone the circular letter was sent; and that the question of the continued obliga-

tion of Jewish believers to keep the law, while relying on Christ alone for salvation, might be said to be left in abeyance ; were it not that an important relaxation was introduced, by the liberty which believing Jews had to hold communion, both public and private, with all who believed in Christ ; which often involved a departure from the strictness of the ceremonial law, and finally abolished it.

As these three, Paul, Silas, and Timothy, passed through the cities where churches were planted, "they delivered to them, for to keep, the dogmas, or decrees, which were determined by the apostles and the elders who were in Jerusalem." The churches, therefore, were strengthened in the faith which they had received from Paul and Barnabas, finding it confirmed by the other apostles and elders of the parent church. They increased in number daily ; and Timothy was introduced to the churches, as we are to the Epistles to Timothy, which was the design of the Acts. Churches increase, when evangelical truth is clearly taught, and holy harmony prevails.

A short account of a long journey, says, "They crossed Phrygia, and the region of Galatia." Read the Epistle to the Galatians, and see how much this includes. The country which lay midway between the Mediterranean and the Euxine, took its name from the Gauls who invaded and conquered it ; and it has been thought that Peter, who wrote his epistle to the strangers in this and the adjoining regions, preached to the circumcision in these parts, when he left Antioch, though Paul preached to the Gauls of Asia, as an apostle to the Gentiles.

The various senses in which the word, "Asia," is used, should be considered, when we read, "They were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia." As one quarter of the globe, it includes all the countries where they did preach ; but it often signifies what we call the Lesser Asia, the most western part of the great continent ; and sometimes what was called Proconsular Asia ; by some, Lydian Asia, or Ionia ; especially the region about Ephesus. The sovereignty of God, in sending the Gospel where and when he pleases, is not the less displayed ; because Paul afterwards did preach in Asia ; for how many may have passed into eternity, in the interval !

Paul and Silas, having gone along Mysia, just above the locality of the seven churches of Asia, attempted to go north-

ward, into Bithynia, on the shore of the Black Sea ; “ and the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not ; ” though the first general council was afterwards held at Nice, in Bithynia. The *addition* of the name of Jesus to the Spirit, is authorised by abundant testimony from manuscripts, and by the Syriac. To plead against this, that the phrase, “ Spirit of Jesus,” nowhere else occurs, is to forget that we have a class called, ἀπαξ λεγόμενα, words occurring only once ; and for the same reason that some now reject it, others may once have dropped it. It is worthy of notice, that Griesbach, by inserting it in the text, has shown with how little reason he has been charged with insidiously opposing the divinity of Christ ; which is clearly implied where the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Jesus, which directed the movements of the apostles. Thus guided, they passed by Mysia, and came down to Troas, on the sea shore, looking towards Europe.

III. THE MISSION OF PAUL TO EUROPE.

In the Troad, the apostle was on what would be called classic ground ; for the region derived its name from Troy, the ten years’ siege of which, formed the theme of “ Homer’s Iliad,” or “ Tale of Troy divine.” But far more real, holy, and important things filled the apostle’s mind. Behold,

1. *The vision.* “ A sight by night was shown to Paul, there was a certain man, a Macedonian, standing exhorting him, and saying, Having crossed over into Macedonia, help us.” As Nebuchadnezzar, falling asleep amidst reflections on the future fate of the empire he reared, was shown its end and its successors ; Paul, reflecting on the reasons why the Spirit of Jesus forbade him to preach in *this* country and in *that*, till he was brought down to the ocean, which seemed to say, “ No farther shalt thou go,” fell asleep and saw the route opened across the sea, to the opposite continent. In vision the man appeared, perhaps, standing on the other shore ; and, as the Macedonians may be called Greeks, there was nothing in his dress, or language, to tell his country, which was discovered, by his saying, “ Come over to *Macedonia*.” But, oh, that cry, “ help us,” is the voice of misery, calling for pity ; of danger, pleading for succour ; of helplessness, asking help from others. The state of those who have not the Gospel is wretched, even in this life,

and dangerous, when you think of death, judgment, and eternity ! But Christians can help. We have a balm for their wounds, deliverance from their perils, light for their darkness, mercy for their crimes, purity for their pollution, and consolation for their woes. On every heathen shore, we should, after this vision, see them standing, stretching out their hands, raising their piteous cry, calling out to us to come and help them, in tones which should pierce our hearts, whether we walk by the way, or sit in the house, or assemble in the church, or lie dosing in our beds, or sink into deep sleep, or start up in our dreams.

2. *The voyage.* "When Paul had seen the vision, immediately *we* sought to set off for Macedonia ; concluding that the Lord had called us to tell them good news" of the help which they asked ; for now all the mystery of the prohibition to preach in Asia was solved. I have marked the word, *we*, which here occurs for the first time, and is remained nearly through the history. Luke, therefore, the writer of the Acts, now joined Paul, and remained almost constantly with him, till he arrived at Rome, a prisoner of state. But the historian, with characteristic modesty, leaves us to infer this, never introducing his own name, nor informing us how he came to join the apostle. Perhaps Luke, led to Troas by a providence similar to that which brought Paul there, was sent, not only to strengthen the party in their new and important mission to Europe, but also to write the history of the planting of the Christian church.

However expensive is the hire of a ship, they seem to have had no difficulty in engaging one, though there were no troops of children to raise seven thousand pounds for the purchase of a " John Williams," as we have lately seen achieved for the conveyance of our missionaries to the South Seas. Having sailed, therefore, from Troas, they ran straight across the entrance of the Dardanelles, where Europe commences, to Samothracia, the island nearest to our continent, and, on the following day, to Neapolis, now called Napoli, and, like the modern Naplous and Naples, meaning new city, on the shore of Macedonia, near Thrace. Having landed at this port, they went a little inland, to Philippi, the next city, which derived its name from the founder, Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great. Philippi was the first, or chief city, of that division of Macedonia,

and a colony. Macedonia was, at different times, variously divided; and though its being a Roman colony, or, as Luther says, a free city, has been disputed, the accuracy of Luke has here also been proved, by the discovery of a medal bearing this legend, "Colonia, Augusta, Julia, Philippi;" showing that Philippi had been made a Roman colony by Julius Cæsar, which was confirmed by Augustus. "And in that city we were passing some days," not knowing the Lord's design, "and on the day of the Sabbath, we came forth out of the city, by a river, where there was accustomed to be prayer," according to our version; but the Syriac says, "because there was seen a house of prayer," for "proseuche" signifies both, just as a meeting-house is called a meeting. The Syriac, written when the practice still prevailed, points to a house, which was a reason why these missionaries went out, on the Sabbath, to the "proseuche," often called shore-house, because erected by the river, or sea-side, and was a mere enclosure without roof.

3. *The conversion of Lydia.* "And having sat down, we spake to the women who were come together." Various are the reasons why women are often found to constitute almost the whole of a religious assembly. War collects men in immense masses, for deeds of blood, and, cutting them off, leaves the women widows or fatherless; voyages, or foreign travels, or necessary labours, remove the men from home; and the business, as well as the pleasures of life, too much blunt their sense of religion; while women, who have more leisure, have frequently more grace. In the present case, the women seem to have been of that class which then abounded, Gentiles by birth, but proselytes to the Jewish faith. "And a certain woman, named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped God, heard, of whom the Lord opened the heart to attend to the things spoken by Paul." Purple was held in much estimation by the ancients, that which was called Tyrian, being celebrated through the world: it was said to be obtained from a shell-fish. Thyatira's dyers are recorded in an ancient medal, and its scarlets are still worn in the East. Lydia was probably of that large class of females, who, being left widows, nobly rouse their energies to support their children, and seldom fail. To sell purple, not to wear it, she left the very region where Paul was forbidden to

preach, and crossed the seas, to find salvation at Philippi; but she was not the only one who has gone from home to be born. “*We* spake to the assembled women,” says the historian, but we read of no success, except in the case of Lydia listening to Paul. For the Lord opened her heart, which had otherwise been closed; and he has the key of David, opening what no one can shut. Not mere attention, though that is the gift of God, is ascribed to the opening of the heart; for the word signifies, the attachment of a disciple to truths believed. If she had before worshipped God in spirit and in truth, she still needed to have her heart opened to the news concerning Christ. But as “she was baptized, and her house,” who probably were all with her, it is observable that her household are not said to have given heed, or believed, or had their hearts opened; though some presume that this must have been the case, as they were baptized. It is surprising, that they do not perceive how this, which is a mere supposition, strengthens, instead of weakening, the evidence for household baptism. For, if she is said to have received the word, and then to have been baptized, to show that believing should precede baptism; if her household believed, and therefore were baptized; was it not as necessary to tell us so, in their case, as in hers? But if the household believed; and we are not told so, but are told that *she* did, and that they were baptized; does it not follow, from the record, that even the *believing* household was baptized *as her household*, since her faith alone is recorded. But this gratuitous supposition is mentally that which is forbidden, “adding to the words of God.” If we believe no more than we are told, it is this, and this only, that Lydia believed; but that she and her household were baptized. As this is a leading case, it is the more important that we should take it simply as it is recorded, and beware of making additions of our own.

“She entreated, saying, If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, or a believer in him, entering into my house, abide there.” What genuine convert to the faith of Christ would not have acted thus? Christians must be “given to hospitality;” and especially towards those who “go forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.” Any Christian who has a house to entertain them, would say, Can I suffer such persons, and my benefactors, to remain at an inn? She, therefore, proved her sincerity; for

“she constrained us,” says Luke, “to abide at her house.” To have refused would have been to treat her as a heathen, for we “take nothing of Gentiles.”

4. *The persecution that arose.* “It happened, as we were proceeding to the (*sic* Griesbach) *proseuche*, or prayer-house, that a certain young woman, having a spirit of divination,” or, as the margin more literally says, “of Python, there met us.” The heathen god of oracles and divination, Apollo, was called Pythius, and his priestess, Pythia, on account of his killing a serpent, called Python. This woman was, perhaps, a slave, from Delphi, who brought her lords much profit by soothsaying, or telling fortunes, like our gipsies. Half fanatic and half impostor, deceiving and being deceived, struck with the bearing of these visitors to the city, she felt how awful goodness is, “and followed Paul and us,” that is, Silas, and Timothy, and Luke. “She cried, saying, These men are servants of the Most High God, who announce to us a way of salvation.” Her inducement to say what God overruled for his glory, we know not; but the apostle silenced her, as Christ did the unclean spirits who proclaimed his honour. The phrase, “way of salvation,” she probably learned from the preachers, without knowing its meaning. The honour she gave them, as servants of the Most High God, may have been intended to return to herself, as his herald to introduce to notice his ministers, from whom she may have expected a reward.

“This she was doing many days, and Paul, being grieved, and having turned, said to the spirit, ‘I command thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her;’ and it came out in the same hour.” This whole affair is encumbered with the difficulty which attends the question of demoniacs and possessions, whatever hypothesis we may adopt. The language of Paul intimates a real possession, by an evil spirit, which was cast out, though it had proclaimed the honours of Christ’s messengers; as Christ, to show that he was not in league with Satan, forbade the demons to say they knew him. Her masters saw that the hope of their gain was gone, by a change in her character, or conduct, so that she would tell fortunes no more; as would certainly be the case, if she were translated from the kingdom of Satan; for some of the Tahitian converts, who had been conjurors, declared they had forgotten their arts. We are assured, by

unwilling witnesses, her own masters, that, through Paul, an alteration was effected, and this was wrought by the name of Jesus Christ, whatever the change may have been. Having seized Paul and Silas, who were deemed the chiefs, they dragged them to the market-place, to the Archons. Greek and Roman customs are mingled, in this narrative of events in a Roman colony among Greeks. The market-place was to them what the forum was to the Latins; and here were their courts of law. Having brought them to the generals, a title of magistracy in a colony where the Romans were civil as well as military commanders; the masters of the young woman said, "These men, being Jews, disturb our city, and announce customs which it is not lawful for us to receive, or to practise, being Romans." Their gain was their god; but their city and their duty furnished the most plausible pretext, as the Romans forbade foreign religions, till they were naturalised by the Senate. So the men made the gods. But the Jews maintained that God made man; and, to the heathen, Christianity appeared at first a form of Judaism.

"The multitude fell upon them;" because the city, as well as the masters, had been enriched by soothsaying. "And the generals, who governed, having torn off the clothes of Paul and Silas, commanded that they should be beaten with rods. And having laid on them many stripes, which were not limited by law, as among the Jews, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor safely to keep them." All this was done, without trial, at the mere cry of interested parties and a fickle mob. He who had received such a charge, cast them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet to the wood. For, as we have seen this word used for the cross, so here we find it put for what we call the stocks; which were a more cruel instrument of torture than among us.

5. *The miraculous deliverance afforded.* Here are all the elements of gloom and grief,—injustice and oppression, exercised by those in power, on unoffending strangers; Roman magistrates, who ought to have been the protectors, become the persecutors of Roman citizens; these, stripped and flogged, shamefully, as well as cruelly, before all the world; cast into a deep dungeon, where they were kept under painful restraint by the stocks; and now the midnight darkness aggravates the

scene. But what do we hear? Not groans and lamentations, much less revengeful execrations; for, "at midnight, Paul and Silas, praying, hymned the God" they served, and for whom they suffered. From the expression of the historian, it seems that, praying for support and consolation, they burst into a hymn of praise, either original, having an inspiration to this effect, or derived from the Scriptures, whose "statutes were David's songs, at midnight, in the house of his pilgrimage." The prisoners heard them, and said, "How cheerful are those men in the inner cell! How joyfully they sing! Hark! they are praising their God." Happy they who have such a God that can "give songs in the night."

"But suddenly the ground heaved, for there was an earthquake, (so) great that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and the fetters of all were loosed." An earthquake might open all the doors, in spite of locks and bars; but the loosing of the fetters was a distinct miracle, and, with all the rest, was designed to honour those who had been so shamefully treated. For God says to his servants: "Since thou hast been precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee; therefore, will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." The prisoners, who had heard the apostles' hymns of praise, must have ascribed to their God this convulsion and deliverance.

6. *The conversion of the jailor.* "The jailor, being waked up by the earthquake, and having seen already opened the doors of the prison, with his drawn sword was going to kill himself, supposing the prisoners to have fled;" for, to a man of his calling, this would be the first thought, though *we* may see reason for a different supposition. But he, thinking that when the doors were opened, the prisoners would instantly escape, and fearing his life would be made to answer for theirs, was about to kill himself, for fear of being killed. For the ancients defended and praised self-murder; and, alas! it has been said in modern times, "What Cato practised, and Addison approved, cannot be wrong."

But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do no injury to yourself;" for he does himself deadly injury who lays violent hands on himself. Hear it, ye who are tempted to suicide!

"We are all here." How could the jailor's intention be

known to the apostle? How did he know the prisoners were all there? He was in the innermost cell, and all was dark. Any sound that may be supposed to have accompanied that of drawing the sword, must have been incoherent exclamations, unintelligible in the dungeon. Without unnecessarily multiplying miracles, we must conclude, that divine intimations were given, to save the life of the man who must afterwards have appeared to Paul as the Macedonian, who had, in vision, called for help from the shores of the Troad. That all the prisoners were still there, could hardly have been known to the apostle, but by the same inspiration; and though it appeared to the jailor, that they must have fled, even unaware as he was that their fetters had dropped off; yet *we* may easily conceive, that this very miracle, as well as the earthquake, would fix them to the spot. The voice of the apostle, bidding him do himself no harm, must have created such reflections as these: "How did this prisoner know I was going to kill myself? Why was he concerned to save the life of the man who had cruelly treated him? How could he tell that the prisoners were all here? Surely these were the servants of the Most High God, as the Pythian declared; and, therefore, the earthquake has been sent for their deliverance. Then they show, as she said, a way of salvation."

The jailor called for a light, and sprang in to the dungeon, whose door stood open; and, being in a tremor, he fell down to Paul and Silas, and, bringing them out, said, "Sirs, what must I do, that I may be saved?" His terror at the earthquake must have been increased, as well as entirely altered, by the effect of Paul's voice; while the evidence it afforded of a divine mission, and his falling at the feet which he had so lately fastened in the stocks, were naturally followed by bringing the prisoners out of their dungeon into some other place, perhaps a court, or hall; where his calling them "lords," as in the Greek, or masters, is scarcely rendered with sufficient force by our English word, "sirs." But they who would avoid the idea of salvation, by rendering his question, "What must I do, to be safe?" *i. e.*, from the consequences of letting the prisoners escape, forget that he had been informed they were all there, and had come in and seen, and brought forth, the two with whom he had been specially charged. Besides, the import of the inquiry is proved by the apostle's answer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be

saved, and thy house." He asked, "What must I do?" and the apostle told him: "Believe in Christ;" he asked to be saved, and the apostle promised he should be saved, and his house too. It should be remembered that the apostle and Silas had, for some time, preached in that city, and their mission had become notorious, by a celebrated Pythian herald. They had been imprisoned for teaching the novel doctrine of salvation by Christ, as the jailor could not but know. The apostle's answer, therefore, was not, even at first, so unintelligible as some would make it; to say nothing of his subsequent more ample explanation of the nature of the salvation of the soul, by believing in Christ.

Deeply muse over the apostle's proclamation, for which his vision and voyage, and the cry of the damsel, and the earthquake and its attendant miracles, were designed to prepare the way. An idolater, of the class of jailors, discovering that he has been afflicting the servants of the Most High God, whose deserved wrath he now deprecates, asks, with trembling limbs and voice, how he may be saved. The apostle sees in him the man who, from the shores of Macedonia, sent his cry into Asia, "Come over, and help us;" and this is the help he brings, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." This is help on the brink of ruin; salvation to the lost.

But it is observable, that the apostle adds, what is too often overlooked,—“and thy house.” This is no novelty. We have just seen it in the house of Lydia; and our Lord had already said, “This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as this (Zaccheus) is a son of Abraham,” to whom God said, “I will be a God to thee and thy seed.”

The jailor had been addressed in the singular: “Believe thou, and thou shalt be saved;” but “thy house” is added. That the house signifies the family, needs not to be proved. That salvation was promised to it, on the jailor's believing, is clear. But when it is said, by some, “That is, if they believe,” is not this making void the word of God? For this might be said of any man's house, or of the jailor's, if he did not believe? The last part of the apostle's address would thus be made nugatory. If we would avoid this, we must admit that, when a man believes, then salvation *comes to his house*, in some real, important sense, which I am not here called to unfold.

And he spake to him the word of the Lord, which he needed

still further to learn, and to all those in his house, who must have been waked up by the earthquake, and collected in the apartment to which he had brought the two prisoners. And having taken them, in that hour of the night, he washed them from their stripes or wounds, the blood of which was adhering to them. And he was baptized, and all his, *immediately*; which last word forbids the idea of a long and laborious process.

"And, having brought them into his house," from that intermediate place which first received them out of the dungeon, he set a table before them, to refresh their afflicted bodies; "and rejoiced domestically, he having believed in God." I have rendered the original more correctly than in our translation, which, however, is virtually the same as the Syriac. But *πανοικί*, which Luke employs, is an unusual adverb, found here, and in Exod. i. 1, where each man is said to have come into Egypt domestically, not as an individual, but as a family-man, "with his house." It has been concluded, from our translation, that all the family of the jailor believed, but it is said in a marked manner, he rejoiced, *πανοικί*, (whatever that may mean), *he* having believed in God. The jailor is the only believer here placed on record, and his having believed is mentioned as the reason for his rejoicing "all domestically," which the peculiar adverb expresses.

It is pleaded by some, that the word of the Lord was spoken to all in his house, and, hence assumed, that the adverb means, all in his house rejoiced, and, therefore, believed. But if this were true, why was it not said, they believed, instead of this marked distinction, *he* having believed? It should be observed, that all this part of the narrative leaves untouched the first address of the apostle, "Believe, and *thou* shalt be saved, and *thy house*;" unless it be supposed that the apostle here prophesies, that, if he believed, all his house would too. But, in that case, it should have been said, "Believe, and thy house shall believe, and be baptized." Those with whom we argue, would be the last to affirm that, whenever a man believes, his house will believe; since this would be giving back with the right hand what they took away with the left.

From the first address of the apostle, as expository of the latter part of the narrative, we must conclude, that the jailor, now believing, rejoiced, as a domestic man, in the blessing promised to his house, if he believed. That the apostle spoke

the word to all in the house ; and that the master rejoiced over all ; standing in marked distinction from the mention of faith as belonging to him alone, shows that the baptism of the family was, like the circumcision of Abraham's family, in virtue of its relation to the head.

6. *The sequel of the story.* Day being come, the general officers, who held the magistracy, sent the staff-bearers, whom we should call beadles, saying, "Let these men go." I suppose the earthquake had alarmed the authorities, who, beginning to suspect these were extraordinary men, were desirous of getting rid of them, lest the fickle populace should take their part, or other prodigies should follow in their defence.

The jailor gladly announced to Paul, that "the generals have sent that you may be liberated: now, therefore, having come out, go forth in peace." He was, doubtless, surprised, and, perhaps, somewhat disturbed, at what followed, so contrary to his expectations. For Paul said to them, that is, the beadles, who brought the message from their superiors: "They, having beaten us publicly, uncondemned; men, who are Romans, have thrown into gaol; and now do they secretly send us away? No, indeed; but having come themselves, let them lead us out." Silas is called a Roman, and his citizenship was, perhaps, one reason why Paul chose him as a companion in this mission among the Gentiles. For we are here taught, that Christians should avail themselves of their civil rights in defence of their persons and their faith; for this is merely claiming the liberty and security which God has given us, and all ought to enjoy.

"The beadles told these words to the generals, and they feared, having heard that they were Romans." Cicero shows what reason they had to fear. "Having come, they entreated them, and having conducted them out of the gaol, they requested them to go out of the city;" longing to escape the danger of punishment, and caring nothing for the way of salvation, which these servants of the Most High God proclaimed.

Paul and Silas showed their superiority to all revengeful obstinacy, by coming out of the prison, and their fearlessness, and Christian friendship, by going into the house of Lydia, that they might not seem to steal away. She was amply repaid for the sorrow she had felt, on account of their persecution and

imprisonment, by this triumphant visit. But when it is said, having seen the brethren, they comforted, or exhorted them, we learn that, after Lydia, others had believed, and joined the company of the faithful, to whom Paul wrote the beautiful Epistle to the Philippians; which should be read as a comment on this chapter. At the request of magistrates who had violated their duty, Paul and Silas went away.

Can we close our review of this mission to Europe, without saying, Well might Europe call on Asia to come over and help us, when the East enjoyed the light of the Sun of Righteousness, and the West lay in pagan darkness. But ah! the movement which brought day to us, left them, at length, in gloomy night.

Remember the message brought by the servants of the Most High God: If your souls are shaken, as by an earthquake; "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and salvation shall give joy and peace."

Nor let it be forgotten that salvation comes to the house of him who embraces the Gospel of Christ. Rejoice domestically, ye heads of houses who have believed personally.

But, oh, listen to the sounds of misery that come across the seas, from every land, borne on every breeze, wafted by every wave, Come over and help us. That, after nearly two thousand years from the reception of the command, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," there should be millions upon millions who have never heard, is our disgrace. "But how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach, except they be sent?"

The nineteenth Lecture has conducted us to our own quarter of the globe, and reminded us of our obligation to that vision of mercy, which eventually brought the knowledge of Christ to our native isle.

LECTURE XX.

PAUL AT THESSALONICA, BEREÄ, AND ATHENS.

ACTS xvii.

“SURELY the wrath of man shall praise thee, O God.” The most numerous apostolical party that we have ever seen traveling together, came over into Europe : Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke. But persecution soon dispersed them, to spread the Gospel in different directions ; for Paul and Silas alone, having been shamefully treated at Philippi, in violation of the Roman laws, meekly complied with the magistrates’ urgent request to depart, leaving Luke and Timothy behind to cherish the infant church. For the historian now says of Paul and his companion, “they ;” not resuming “we,” till the twentieth chapter. Follow the footsteps, therefore, first of the two who had been delivered from prison, and then of Paul alone, to one of the most important stations he ever occupied, Athens ; whither the persecutors may be said to have sent the light of revelation, to eclipse the dim taper of human science and reason, falsely so called.

I. THE SCENE AT THESSALONICA.

They journeyed through Amphipolis, now called Emboli, which, being surrounded by the river Strymon, took the name that signifies the *surrounded* city, whither Cimon had sent a

colony of 10,000 Athenians. Of the labours or the success of the preachers we are not informed; but they passed on to Apollonia, nearer to the sea, where was a Corinthian colony, celebrated for learning, in whose school Augustus acquired his knowledge of Greek. This place, as on the borders of Illyricum, is thought to have been referred to in Rom. xv. 19.

Out of their direct route, they went, for the sake of the Gentiles, the Jews having no synagogues there. Thence the apostle and his companion came to Thessalonica, a splendid maritime city, anciently called Halys and Thermæ, but Philip of Macedon, having here conquered the Thessalians, called it by the name which signifies the Thessalian victory. This was at the bottom of the Gulf of Saloniki, and was the resort of merchants, who might bear the tidings of the Gospel to distant lands. Here was the synagogue, not the building, but meeting of the Jews. Salonica is still, next to Constantinople, the most important place in the Ottoman empire. Notice the labours and persecutions of the apostle here.

1. *Paul's labours in the ministry.* "According to the custom with Paul, he entered in to the Jews, and for three Sabbath days he was conversing with them, from the Scriptures, opening and laying it down, that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer, and to rise from the dead; and that this is the Messiah, Jesus, whom I announce to you."

These three Sabbaths seem to have been all that the apostle spent in this city, so important in itself, and subsequently so celebrated in the Christian church, by means of the epistles to the Thessalonians, which were the commencement of that class of inspired Scripture. He was hurried away, ere he could fully unfold his message. "His discoursing from the Scriptures," shows why the message of mercy was first addressed to the Jews, who were entrusted and acquainted with the sacred writings. He lays down this truth, that "the Messiah was to suffer, and rise from the dead," which we have seen proved by appeals to the 16th Psalm, and may be further demonstrated by the 53rd of Isaiah. This being admitted, the next point was more easily proved, that "this is the Messiah, Jesus, whom I announce to you." Could the Jews be brought to own what the Scriptures say of the death and resurrection of Messiah, they might see that Jesus was he. "And some of them were persuaded that

it was true, and cast in their lot with Paul and Silas ; both of the worshipping Greeks, a great multitude ; and of the chief women, not a few :” for they who believe, cast in their lot with the people of God. The frequent mention of Greeks who feared and worshipped God, being found in the synagogues, and receiving the Gospel from the apostles who preached there, shows how Providence had been preparing for the calling of the Gentiles. The women, who sat apart in the synagogues, and of whom some were high in rank, embraced the truth in considerable numbers. On this evangelical triumph the best comment is the first epistle to the Thessalonians, where the apostle says, “ Our gospel came not to you in word only, but in power, after we were shamefully treated, as ye know, at Philippi.”

2. *The persecution excited by the Jews.* Ver. 5—9. Here I adopt Griesbach’s reading. “ But the Jews having taken certain wicked men of the markets (or law-courts), and having made a mob, disturbed the city ; and, besetting the house of Jason, were seeking them to bring them out to the people.” This Jason is mentioned by Paul to the Romans (xvi. 21) as his “ kinsman.” The unbelieving Jews would have dragged him out, to be torn in pieces by an infuriate mob. But Paul and Silas were either concealed in Jason’s house, or sent away by him, who suffered himself rather to be the victim. Paul found a confessor among his kinsmen according to the flesh. Disappointed, the Jews dragged Jason and certain brethren to the Politarchs, or city-magistrates, roaring out, “ They who have unsettled the world ! These are come here also ! whom Jason has harboured ; and these all, contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, are practising, saying there is another king, Jesus.” The bold, not to say bald, idiom which our translators have adopted, “ turned the world upside down,” has given rise to congenial comments, such as saying, “ It was high time ; for the world has been, too long, wrong side upwards.” But the cry which Luke records, merely expresses the disturbed state of things which the preaching of Christ’s missionaries had created. Yet what a testimony was this to the apostles and their message ! It had unsettled the world ! Gentiles had forsaken their idols, and Jews had embraced their Messiah ! Old systems were crumbling away, and a new one was rising on their ruins ! Little did the rioters think how much more true their words

would yet prove ! But who can hear their charge of treason against Cæsar without blushing for the Jews ? They knew well that they themselves professed a religion hostile to that of Cæsar, and were looking for a conquering king, while they were making this an accusation against the Christians. But the cry of treason has often been raised by traitors. That the apostles said “ there was another king,” was most true, but most innocent ; for they maintained that Jesus was a prophet, and a priest, and a king too ; but King of souls, of religion, of sentiments, and affections, —a kingdom not of this world, not allowing its servants to fight for it, and, therefore, deemed by Pilate, before whom Jesus confessed himself a king, a very harmless affair. For the kings of this world have no fear of a rival who will not fight. Claudius, we shall soon see, made the Jews sick of their zeal for the decrees of Cæsar, when he commanded all Jews to depart from Rome. It has been thought that some of these rioters had been at Jerusalem, and joined in the cry that Luke says was raised there : “ We have no king but Cæsar ; we found this man perverting the nation, forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that he himself is Christ, a king.” Alas ! when Christ abandoned them, Cæsar crushed them.

“ But they agitated both the crowd and the city authorities,” too, who heard these things, and knew the timid jealousy of Cæsar. “ Having taken sufficient security from Jason and the rest, they dismissed them ;” for Jason, and the other brethren who had been dragged to the tribunal, became bail for their own appearance, and, perhaps, for that of Paul and Silas.

On being better informed, the magistrates released the citizens from this obligation, seeing through the craft of the Jews. Such is the history of the founding of the Christian church at Thessalonica. The Epistles to the Thessalonians show that Paul “ worked night and day,” though he tells the Philippians, “ You sent even to Thessalonica, once and again, to my necessities.”

II. THE ENTRANCE OF THE GOSPEL TO BEREÄ. Ver. 10—15.

Here, again, we have to follow the footsteps of the missionaries and of the persecutors.

1. *The Christian missionaries.* Ver. 10—12. “ The brethren immediately, by night, sent away both Paul and Silas to Berea.”

This, which is now called Veria, was on the other side of the gulf, about forty miles west, and beyond Pella, where Alexander was born. Arrived there, the two went away to the synagogue of the Jews. Superiority to all revenge, and all prejudice against the persecuting nation, was rewarded by an event full of beauty, instruction, and encouragement; for, if we pursue our duty, from love to God and man, we shall not lose our reward.

“These were more generous than those in Thessalonica; who received the word with all promptitude, daily examining the Scriptures, whether these things were so.” Their more noble disposition, at first received the statement with all the readiness which its apparent truth demands; but they took time for examination, studying the Scriptures daily, comparing the written word with the apostle’s living voice. If the Old Testament and the New both come from God, they must agree. Many, therefore, convinced of the harmony, believed; of the Greek women that were genteel, and of the men not a few. Grecian women, by worshipping God in the synagogue, heard Paul; and I had almost called them the fashionable, when I recollected how Juvenal satirises the ladies of fashion, at Rome, for frequenting the synagogue. The Grecian men come in, as following whither mothers, wives, sisters, or daughters, led. If “not many noble are called,” God “provides of his goodness for the poor,” by calling sufficient numbers of the rich to “distribute to the necessities of saints.” Women in high life, taking greater liberties, gave a fashion to Judaism first, and then to Christianity; and “how knowest thou, O wife, but thou mayest save thy husband?” The rich being liberal, there was no want of conveyances, by land, or sea, when the Gospel made its first circuit through the world.

I might here turn aside from the history, to exhibit the example of the noble Bereans, as worthy of all imitation. For the apostle having wrought no miracle, but appealed to the Scriptures, as divine, they searched them daily, and, therefore, believed. Yet some presumptuous mortals, making high pretensions to apostolicity, frown on those who dare to search the Scriptures, and see whether the things spoken are true or false. I cannot approve of Calvin’s notion that Luke goes back, to say that the more noble of the *Thessalonians* believed;

for he has left Thessalonica, and Luke is now speaking of the Bereans.

1. *The persecutors again present themselves to our view.* "For as the Jews of Thessalonica knew, that also in Berea was announced, by Paul, the word of God, they came there too, agitating the crowds." The enmity to Paul was the more fierce in the breasts of the Jews, as he had once been their champion against the Christians, and as he was now the apostle of the Gentiles ; so that the conversion of the Greeks of Berea provoked Jews to rage. Read, again, the letter to the Thessalonians, Second Epistle, ii. 14—16.

But their persecuting temper and conduct, proved both their want of argument to refute the evidences of our religion, and their utter destitution of that moral taste which is necessary to welcome a revelation so holy, benevolent, and divine. We are reminded of Tertullian's remark, that the first imperial persecutor of the best of religions, was Nero, the worst of men. The hatred of persecutors is a compliment to the truth. The special object of the Jewish enmity, "Paul, the brethren sent off towards the sea;" but both Silas and Timothy, who had joined them, remained there, to cherish the generous converts and increase their numbers. The Greek $\omega\varsigma$, being taken by our translators in its ordinary signification, "as it were," has led to the conclusion that a movement was made towards the sea, to mislead the persecutors ; and that the apostle really travelled by land. But the Greeks use $\omega\varsigma$, when nothing else is intended, but that the person moved as he would who was going to sea ; *i.e.*, he went towards the sea.

III. PAUL'S MINISTRY AT ATHENS, now followed.

They who accompanied Paul brought him as far as Athens, two hundred and fifty miles, a much longer voyage than is generally supposed, down the Gulf of Salonica, and through a part of the Archipelago ; doubling the Cape or Promontory of Sunium. This seems to have been intended to place him far from the Jews, who were tracking his steps, as blood-hounds. But God overruled it for the diffusion of the Gospel in the most important parts of the world. The attendants who had shown such solicitude for his welfare, having received a command, or, as the Syriac expresses it, a letter to Silas and Timothy, to come

to him as quickly as possible, went away again, to their own home in Berea.

Paul at Athens! What an interesting object to him who, as a Christian, can sympathise with the person, and, as a scholar, has all the associations that belong to the place! The city, still called Attene, and lately become the seat of a new Greek kingdom, had been founded 1,556 years before the Christian era, and was called Athenæ, or Minerva, the name of the Grecian goddess of wisdom. It had, at one time, 120,000 inhabitants. No spot on earth was so famous for its citizens, its architecture, science, eloquence, patriotism, and arms; so that it was called the eye of Greece; and Greece, the eye of the world. Though it had resisted, under Pericles, the invasions of the Persian monarchs, it fell before the Macedonians, in spite of the philippics of Demosthenes, its most celebrated citizen. Under the yoke of the Romans, who made Corinth the seat of government, Athens was still regarded by Cicero as the University of the Roman empire and of the world.

“At Athens, Paul being in waiting for them,” *i.e.*, Silas and Timothy, “his spirit was excited within him, surveying the idolatrous city;” or, as the Syriac expresses it, “his spirit was embittered in him, seeing the city all full of idols.” For superstition had promoted sculpture, which, in its turn, had multiplied images; some of them, especially those formed by the chisel of Phidias, being famous through the world, till they had more idols than all the rest of Greece, and it was said, you may more easily find at Athens, a god, than a man.

As for Paul, “he discoursed, therefore, in the synagogue to the Jews, and with devout persons of other nations, who came there; and in the market-place, or forum, with those whom he happened to meet.” Market, as the name of a particular locality, might apply to several spots in Athens; but one was *the* market, by emphasis. The conduct of Paul in discoursing with those he happened to meet, may seem strange; but it was in perfect harmony both with the place, for it was a forum, or court of law; and with the people, for the Athenians met here for conversation and discussion, as Theophrastus and other Greek writers show. There were hundreds of public seats, called by a name which might be translated, gossiping places; for a people who are called “laborious gossips.” “But some of the Epicurean and

Stoic philosophers attacked him in dispute, and some said, "What would this babbler wish to say?" And others, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign dæmons, or deities;" because he was telling them the good news, Jesus, and the resurrection.

Numerous were the sects of philosophy among the Greeks; and all were found at Athens. The two, whose philosophers fell upon Paul, were among the the most distinguished; beside which, there were the Peripatetic, or Aristotelian; and the Socratic, or Platonic schools. The Epicureans derived their name from Epicurus, who lived three hundred years before the Christian era, and is thought to have been better than his followers; for all the sects passed through various changes; and this one, at last, became atheistic and licentious. The holiness of the Christian religion would make it hateful to men who either denied the existence of gods, or made them nugatory beings, indifferent to human affairs; leaving us to worship pleasure, without hope or fear of future existence.

The Stoics, followers of Zeno, derived their name from the stoa, or porch, in which he taught that there were gods, indeed, but that they and all things were bound by fate. This sect placed happiness in virtue, or the extinction of the passions, which made their wise men superior, in their own esteem, to their gods. They believed in a future state, and a renovation of the world by fire; but, as the result of a blind fate, not by the moral government of an intelligent and holy God.

Both these sects seem to have attacked Paul, with argument, in a contemptuous manner; for, what we call a babbler is, literally, a seedpicker, or person who picked up, for his support, the loose seeds that lay about in the market; by which they meant, that he was merely picking up opinions, and retailing them for a living. But when others said, "he seems to be a preacher of foreign dæmons," it should be recollected that the heathens supposed many of those whom they worshipped, to be men deified after their death, or become good dæmons; for they did not, by dæmon, mean, as we usually do, something equivalent to devil. Jesus, the theme of Paul's discourse, they seem to have taken for one of these good demons, who, after death, had become to the Christians what his demon was to Socrates, as they had heard the death of Jesus declared by Paul. The resurrection, being a feminine noun in Greek, is thought to

have been taken for a female deity, or dæmon, and the Athenians, knowing neither Jesus nor resurrection, called them foreign, which would have been no objection to them, if, in others respects, they pleased; for the heathens had celebrated annals of the introduction of foreign gods and worship into new regions; and the Athenians were notorious for naturalising foreign-gods. So ignorantly did this university of the learned world pervert the apostolic testimony to Jesus and the resurrection! "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools;" for if you suppose they were not so ignorant as they pretended to be, it was folly to sport with these awful themes.

Having, then, taken him, "they conducted Paul to the Areopagus, saying, Can we know what is this new doctrine spoken by thee? For certain foreign things thou bringest to our ears;" and, till foreign religion was sanctioned by the state, it was criminal. "We wish, therefore, to know what these things can be. For all the Athenians and the strangers sojourning (there), on nothing else spend their leisure, than to say something and to hear what is more new." Our translators have rendered the same word, in one place, Areopagus, and in another, Mars-hill; but, in both, it signifies the Court which somewhat answers to our Chancery; being the highest tribunal in Athens, which took cognizance of the most momentous affairs in Greece, and especially of those which concerned morals and religion. The judges of this tribunal, for many ages, held in the highest veneration as a court of appeal, from all Greece, sat near the Acropolis, on an eminence called Areopagus, Mars-hill, because Mars, their god of war, was said to have given judgment on that rocky summit. It was open to the sky, from a superstitious aversion to bringing the accusers and accused under one roof. Here religious causes were tried, and, as no gods were to be adored till sanctioned by the Areopagus, Paul was brought hither for discussion, in which the Athenians took delight. They ask whether they *could* become acquainted with the new doctrine; for the leaders of sects affected mystery, and purposely concealed from all but those who could pay well, their more recondite system. They now told the apostle what they had before said among themselves, that he brought foreign things to their hearing. The character given to the Athenians, and the foreigners who came, from all parts, to study there, is well

known to be true, that they either told something themselves, or spent their time in hearing what was considered still more fresh news. Demosthenes reproaches his fellow-citizens that, when all was at stake, they were "standing about, and asking what news? "Is Philip dead?" And Theophrastus exhibits one saying to anybody he met, "Whence do you come? What do you tell? Have you any news?" It was in this spirit that these philosophers questioned Paul.

But, standing in the Areopagus, where he may have seen more idols than men, as the images occupied the most conspicuous positions; and recalling the celebrated statesmen, orators, artists, philosophers, and writers, in every department of literature, Paul said, "Athenians, in all things I observe you as more than ordinarily devoted to the invisible powers. For, coming along and surveying your objects of reverence, I found, also, an altar, in which is inscribed, 'To an unknown God.' Whom, therefore, not knowing, you worship, him I announce to you." The opportunity which even an idle curiosity afforded, the apostle seized, to convey "life eternal, the knowledge of the true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent;" though it was an arduous task to stand up in such a place, and to such an audience, to deliver such a message. That our translators have not succeeded in rendering the apostle's sermon into English, is not surprising; for who has been able to satisfy himself? It was, however, a great mistake to represent the apostle, as, at the outset, rudely affronting them, by saying, "You are too superstitious;" for, not to say that this implies some degree of superstition may be right, the word superstition applied to a person's religion, is offensive. It might, with equal propriety, have been rendered, "you are, in everything, of the more religious turn." But, as "superstition" is offensive, and "religion" is too respectful; it is necessary to keep in view the invisible powers called *dæmons*, to whom, says the apostle, "Ye are more, or much, devoted." This was both true and no affront; as they would admit that their city was full of the images of these beings, and of processions and ceremonies designed to do them honour. The altar which the apostle tells them he found inscribed to an Unknown God, is said to have been reared, because, in a great plague, they offered sacrifices to all the known gods, and obtained no relief,

which led them to erect an altar and offer sacrifice to some offended, but Unknown God, in a spot where sheep had lain down, as if offering themselves to be sacrificed there.

The wisdom of Paul's appeal to the altar and its inscription, will be more conspicuous, if you reflect that there was some accusation insinuated in what they said of *foreign* deities ; but this altar had sanctioned the "unknown." To show them that they acknowledged there was a God not known to them, was to take away the offence of saying, "Him I announce to you."

"The God who made the world and all that are in it ; this, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands ; neither by hands of men is served, needing anything ; himself giving to all life and breath, and all things ; and he has made of one blood every nation of men, to dwell on all the face of the earth ; having fixed the foreordained seasons, and the bounds of their habitation ; that they may seek the Deity, if, indeed, they may feel and find him—being, however, not far from every one of us ; for, in him, we live, and move ourselves, and exist ; as, also, some of the poets among you have said, 'For his own race are we.' Being, therefore, a race from the Deity, we ought not to think the Divine Being to be like to gold, or silver, or stone, carved by art and man's invention. Those times of ignorance, therefore, God having overlooked, now commands all men, everywhere, to repent ; because he has fixed a day in which he is about to judge the world in righteousness, by a man whom he has defined, affording credible evidence to all, having raised him from the dead."

From the worship of deified creatures, the apostle calls them to adore the Creator of all things as infinite, and, therefore, not confined to temples, as if he needed a house to live in ; independent, and, therefore, needing nothing from us—though they pretended to clothe and feed their gods—but giving everything to us. Having made from the blood of one man all nations, he could enjoin only one religion ; and that being foreign at Athens, was no reason for its rejection. He that fixed the limits of the nations on different parts of the earth, has also ordained certain seasons, for different dispensations and degrees of favour to men.

The end to which we should apply all this is, to seek God ; though it should be but like feeling after him who, however,

must be near us all; for, in the life that he imparts, we live; and by him we have the power of locomotion; for, it is the middle voice, expressive of action on ourselves, which the apostle employs. An appeal is made to one of their poets, Aratus, the Cilician, Paul's own countryman, who wrote on astronomical phenomena, a very celebrated poem, which Cicero translated. As the hemistich quoted has the *rhythmus* in Greek, it should be preserved in every translation: "For we his offspring are;" or, "his own race are we." Our relation to God, confessed by their poet, is employed to show the folly of thinking their idols to be gods. The apostle reminds them that God had foreordained a suite of dispensations; and, after having overlooked those times of ignorance, when he left all to their own ways, he now commanded all to repent, and prepare for the judgment of Christ, of which a pledge had been given in his resurrection from the dead.

It is difficult to decide whether we should say, "God *overlooked*, or despised, abhorred, the times of ignorance;" which last Hesychius seems to sanction.

IV. THE RESULT OF THE DISCOURSE.

The solemnities of the resurrection and the judgment day made the philosophers uneasy, and they interrupted. Having heard "a resurrection of the dead," some mocked; and others said, "We will hear thee again concerning this." The mockers seemed the more impious; but, perhaps, were the more honest; for the preaching of the Gospel was, to the philosophical Greeks, foolishness; while those who said, "We will hear thee again," probably designed this as a civil way of escape.

And thus Paul went out from the midst of them who had brought him into the Areopagus, from vain curiosity, or a hope of showing their superior logical skill. But some men, being knit to him, believed; among whom, also, was Dionysius, the Areopagite, or member of the supreme court; and a woman named Damaris, and others with them. It has been said, that, in other places, Paul fished with a drag-net, and caught shoals; but, in Athens, he angled with a hook, and caught two. But, if only two are mentioned as distinguished, there were others, though the whole number seems to have been small. Down to a late date in the history of the church, even after the empire

had become Christian, Athens was heathen; and the church of Christ scarcely maintained a feeble existence, till the irruption of the barbarians laid the ancient university in the dust. Of Dionysius, who has been pronounced St. Denys of Paris, the ancients said—more than they knew—that he went to Egypt, to study; and there saw the earth darkened at Christ's crucifixion; but, returning to Athens, was converted, and became the first bishop of the Christian church.

Forbidden, by its importance, to shun the task; I am oppressed with the consciousness of inability to give an adequate review of Paul's ministry at Athens. It reminds us that our religion was not cradled in ignorance; that far from dreading investigation, it sought, not the obscure village, but presented itself at once to the most important cities of the world. "Beginning at Jerusalem," where the only living and true God was best known, by means of the ancient revelation, and where the great facts which it asserted concerning Christ could be most satisfactorily ascertained; it advanced to the chief cities of the Gentiles, such as Antioch, the queen of the East, whose splendid ruins still proclaim the high advancement of the human race. We now behold the new religion arrived, not at Rome, where war rather than science swayed the sceptre—for what has the authority of force to do with religion?—but at Athens, to which the Romans themselves went to acquire knowledge.

Here the apostle of Christ confutes the only subterfuge left to scepticism or infidelity. For as the evidence of his sincerity is overwhelming, the enemies have said, he was a well-meaning enthusiast, full of the Jewish Scriptures and their Messiah, and mad upon this one idea, that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised hero. But now we see him, no longer in the synagogue among Jews, but in the Areopagus, amidst philosophers. Where is the enthusiast of one idea? He might have been bred, like Socrates, among the Athenians, whose favourite prejudices he refutes, not by appeals to the book of Scripture, but by pointing to the volume of nature, the heavens over his head, the earth beneath his feet, and by quotations from the wiser, or even the wisest among their own poets. Till he comes to the end of his discourse, we hear nothing of the Messiah, nor even then are his claims derived from Scriptures of which the Athenians knew nothing. Is this the Jewish

enthusiast, brim-full, running over with one notion? At last, a fact, the resurrection of Jesus, which, like all others, must be tried by its appropriate evidence, is adduced to prove a great moral truth, the last judgment. Suppose, for a moment, that what Paul was commissioned from heaven to teach, had been believed by Socrates, on rational principles, could he have adopted a more Socratic mode of bringing over Athenians to his views?

Those Christians who are best acquainted with the Greek, which the apostle employed, and with the whole history and circumstances of the sphere which he now occupied, are most deeply impressed with the exquisite delicacy and rational force of the sermon which Luke records. It is short, and may be delivered in five minutes; for he was interrupted by those who, with true Athenian levity, mocked, when they should have argued. But it is complete, refuting the idolatry of the Gentile world, who had no written revelation, by all that reason can derive from creation and the history of past ages, and introducing the Christian revelation to mankind, by a declaration of the moral government of God, and a future judgment to be exercised by Jesus Christ, in whose person the resurrection of the dead is proved by the most credible evidence—a demonstrable fact.

But where is the furious enthusiast? the sectarian bigot? Appeals to reason, which philosophers could not answer, are delivered with the meekness of wisdom, which might disarm enmity itself; with a spirit of universal philanthropy, as one who, utterly unlike the exclusive Jew, felt that all men had the same blood in their veins, and with a solemn benevolence, most befitting a preacher, who is expecting to stand, with his audience, at the judgment-seat of Christ. It would require a volume, or at least a distinct treatise, fully to demonstrate how the argument applies to the almost atheistic Epicurean, and to the proud fatalist Stoic; and, indeed, these minute investigations better suit the professor of Greek in a college than the expositor of Scripture in the church. The appeal to the poets in the plural, is followed by a quotation from one only, Aratus, the Cilician; but almost the same words are found in other poets, whom Clemens Alexandrinus quotes in his "Stromata."

That Paul was mocked, and left few converts among the Athenians, would be pronounced by the philosopher analogous

with the death of Socrates; and with the flight of other distinguished men, who said, they would not give Athens another opportunity of sinning against philosophy. But the Christian knows, that "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; for the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." Survey the conduct of the apostle and of the philosophers at Athens, and say, with whom wisdom took up her abode? In this university of philosophers, the apostle alone displays the spirit of true philosophy.

But that God, no longer turning away his indignant countenance from the times of this ignorance, now "commands all men everywhere to repent," and prepare for the judgment-seat of Christ, should first penetrate our own souls with a deep conviction of the necessity of turning to God through Christ, that we may stand accepted in the great appointed day; and then should animate us to benevolent zeal for the publication of this high command, among the nations who are still infatuated with idols of gold, and silver, and stone, engraved by human arts; but supposed to be like the Godhead. The resurrection from the dead burst upon the heathen, when that of Jesus was declared by the first missionary; and to this day creates the same surprise which it formerly produced. For Minutius Felix, one of the earliest Latin fathers, says, the pagan whom he laboured to convert, exclaimed, "Christians concoct old wives' fables, pretending to be reproduced, after death has reduced them to dust and ashes, and with so unaccountable confidence they believe each other's lies, that you would think they had already risen from the dead." In the same spirit, the missionary to the interior of Africa, Moffatt, relates that one of the chiefs exclaimed, "What was that you said? Did I rightly understand you? Do you mean to say, that we shall return to life again after we have died? What! shall all those that I have killed rise up from the dead? Incredible!" But, whatever appearance of incredulity men may put on, they often mock, because they feel; and laugh, that they may not cry; for the resurrection of the dead, proved by that of Christ, shakes the soul to its centre; and where the more refined morality and abstract theology of our religion could not touch the heathen mind, the palpable facts of the rising dead, and the judgment-seat, wake up the imagination, and bid the conscience do its work.

See the true Christian spirit, surveying this fallen world ! What is its utmost glory, even though Athens should display all that is profound in science, and all that is elegant in art, to the man who, jealous for the incorruptible God, sees him shut out from his own world, by images made like to corruptible man, and birds, and quadrupeds, and reptiles ? But the holy fire in an apostle's breast impels to no violence ; no rushing into the temples with bitter reproaches against the idols and their worshippers, and no attempts to pull down the altars, or the gods. The voice of instruction appeals to reason, the tones of benevolence address the heart ; that the worshippers may drag down the idols with their own hands. For, till *they* do it, it is not done.

But, see, how peaceful is the scene ! How safe is the apostle at Athens, compared with what we have witnessed elsewhere. Greek philosophers put to shame Jewish persecutors. Paul departed from the Areopagus unhurt, or attacked only by the bloodless weapons of mockery and scorn. But why depart, then ? Ah, the novelty was gone, and then he may as well go ; for something still more new was sought by the fickle Athenians, and the living and true God himself, because he is old as eternity, is nothing !

Lecture the twentieth has made us acquainted with the first church to which an apostolic epistle, that to the Thessalonians, was sent ; and with the attack which Christianity made on the head-quarters of idolatry.

LECTURE XXI.

PAUL AT CORINTH.

ACTS xviii.

THE book of Scripture on which we dwell, like a mighty river, flowing through a spacious region, never detains you to observe the less obvious streamlets that diverge on either hand. You would not, therefore, have supposed, while viewing Paul at Athens, that he sent Timothy from thence to the new church of the Thessalonians, whence the apostle had been, after three Sabbaths, driven by the storm. But this we learn from the epistle to that church: "When we could no longer contain, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone," (1 Thess. iii. 1—8); and from the chapter on which we now enter. After this hint, to show what minor events Luke passed over, amidst the more important events of the history, we proceed to exhibit Paul in a new scene of labour, Corinth, where we have to notice his more private life, his public ministry, his renewed persecutions, and that which we may call the episode concerning Apollos.

I. PAUL'S MORE PRIVATE LIFE. Ver. 1—3.

"But, after these things, Paul, withdrawn from Athens, came to Corinth." This place may be said to be familiar to the unlearned, by means of that foreign fruit which we call currants, which derive their name from Corinth. The city stood on the

isthmus which joins the Peloponnesus to the main land of Attica; and had two ports, Lechæum on the west, and Cenchrea on the east, whence it was called Bimaris, or the city of two seas. Celebrated for arms and arts, especially for the Corinthian order of architecture; when taken by the Romans, it suffered a conflagration, which caused the several metals that adorned the city to run together, and thus produced a compound, which we have noticed as called Corinthian brass, valued above gold. Wealth here produced excessive luxury; and the worship of Venus added debauchery too infamous to be described. The expenses of the place gave rise to a kind of proverb, that not every man could afford to visit Corinth. Julius Cæsar restored the ruined city, and planted there a Roman colony; so that it became the seat of government.

Here we are told, that "Paul, having found a certain Jew, named Aquila, of Pontus, recently come from Italy, and Priscilla, his wife, (because Claudius had ordered all Jews to depart from Rome,) came to them." The reasons for introducing these persons will shortly appear. Meanwhile, we may adduce the testimony of Suetonius, the biographer of the Cæsars, who says of Claudius: "*Judæos, impulsore Chresto, assidue tumultuantes, Româ expulit.*"—Claudius v., cap. 25. For Christo, signifying the anointed, of which Suetonius knew not the meaning; he, as well as others, put Chresto, another Greek word, signifying the mild, or good, supposing that this was some living person, who made the Jews riotous. But, as Aquila and Priscilla had been Jewish converts to Christ, at Rome, we learn that the Jews there had, as in other places, raised tumults against their countrymen who embraced the Gospel; and that Claudius had, under the name of Jews, banished also the Christians, who were for a long time naturally deemed a Jewish sect. Claudius, who, having hidden himself when his predecessor Caligula was murdered, was found by a soldier, and, expecting to be killed, was revered and exalted to the throne; was one of the most timid and suspicious of mortals, never venturing on a military expedition, but to Britain, where, without fighting, he obtained a triumph. Alarmed by the conduct of the Jews, he expelled them from Rome, and with them the Christians; so that Hug, a candid Catholic writer on the Epistle to the Romans, thinks that the

church was but beginning to re-assemble, under the next emperor, Nero, when Paul wrote that letter, which may often be explained by keeping this hypothesis in view. Aquila and Priscilla were, perhaps, travelling from Brundisium (the port from which the Romans crossed over) to Pontus, their native place; and had taken, on their way, Corinth, as the seat of the Roman government, which would afford them an opening for their trade.

“And, because they were of the same occupation, he (Paul) remained with them and worked; for they were tent-makers by trade.” As war was the business of the Romans, and their most distinguished men passed their lives in the tented field; when dominion introduced luxury, their tents were palaces. Julius Cæsar, who first extended their conquests to this isle, travelled with a chest of *tesselæ*, which were laid down to form, where he pitched his tent, those tessellated pavements, which we occasionally discover under ground. When such beauties were displayed beneath their feet, splendid were the tents reared over their heads. Paul had learned, according to the Jewish maxim which we have already noticed, the art of tent-making; and, as he was now among the Gentiles, from whom Christian missionaries would receive nothing, and his host had probably been impoverished by the recent exile from Rome, the apostle worked with his own hands for his support. Paul was called by one of the fathers, Sutor, shoemaker, because he sewed leather, of which tents were made. Thus the New Testament pours contempt upon the priestly pride, that supposes there is an inconsistency between working at a trade and preaching the Gospel of Christ. The only inconsistency is with professors of Christianity, who refuse, when able, to support the ministry. Honour to the tent-makers, who, by the labour of their hands, introduce the Gospel to the heathen, or minister to the poor and destitute among Christians. But among heathens let them take their place, who, having it in their power, refuse to “administer carnal things to those who minister to them in spirituals.” The Corinthians, when converted, received from Paul this rule. 1 Cor. ix. 13, 14.

When, therefore, the apostle laboured among the Corinthians, after they became Christians, and was supported by others, he says, “I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to serve

you." How many ministers rob their own families in this way, taking their support from their private property, while serving the public! There is no more reason in refusing to support them, because they are supposed not to need it, than there is in refusing to pay a tradesman's bills, because he is deemed rich. Christ's command is simply and absolutely, that they who preach the Gospel, should live of the Gospel, from which nothing but the people's inability can excuse them; and then a minister should think himself happy and honoured in being able to "make the Gospel without charge." To preach to heathen or to paupers for nothing, is a privilege; to minister to rich Christians, without adequate support, is a robbery.

II. HIS PUBLIC LABOURS. · Ver. 4—11.

These were, as usual, first among the Jews, and then among the Gentiles.

1. *Among the Jews.* "Paul held a dialogue in the synagogue, every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks;" for the latter were here also found worshipping the true God, and were, as in other places, among those who were persuaded that the things spoken were true. "But when there came down from Macedonia, both Silas, who had been left at Berea, and Timothy, who had been sent to Thessalonica, Paul was constrained by the word, testifying to the Jews, the Messiah, Jesus." Our translators, following one manuscript, say, "pressed in spirit;" but others, with the Syriac, have led me to give, "constrained by the word." The same verb that occurs here, the historian has employed in his Gospel, where we read, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I *straitened* till it be accomplished!" The word of the Gospel committed to the apostle was, as Jeremiah says, "like a fire within him, and he was weary with holding it in." When, therefore, two others had come to his aid, he was under a holy compulsion to testify, with increasing earnestness and assiduity, the doctrine of the Messiah, Jesus.

When they to whom he spake "set themselves in opposition, and blasphemed, he, having shaken his garments, said to them, "Your blood on your head; I am pure; from the present time, to the Gentiles I will go." Those who have attempted to tread in the steps of the apostle, by speaking of Christ to the Jews,

may have found how they range themselves in hostile attitude, "blaspheming that worthy name by which we are called." The awful form of farewell which the apostle adopted, was not the result of passion; for Christ had commanded the apostles to "shake off the dust of their feet, for a testimony" against those who rejected their message; and Nehemiah says, "I shook my lap and cried, So God shake out every man from his house that performeth not this promise; even thus be he shaken out, and emptied; and all the congregation said, Amen." "Your blood upon your head," expresses the most awful doom,—the life of the soul gone, as that of the body would be, if its blood were shed by our own hands; perdition incurred by one's own fault; all our sins on our own head. Who is able to bear it? Let him that refuses to receive the testimony of Christ, say, "Can I?" For, however true it is, that the grace of God alone saves us from going down to perdition, with our blood on our own head; that grace saves us from a doom to which we might be most justly left.

Happy the minister who can say, "I am pure." For if the wicked perish because we have not warned him, he shall die in his iniquity; but God says to the watchman, "His blood will I require at thy hands." "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God of my salvation. Open my lips, and let sinners be converted unto thee." If the apostle says, "Henceforth I will go to the Gentiles;" in another place he adds, "for so hath the Lord commanded."

2. *To the Gentiles the apostle turned.* Passing thence, that is, from the synagogue, where this melancholy parting occurred, "he went into the house of one named Justus," who seems to have been called also Titus; for the Syriac gives him the latter name, and some manuscripts call him Titus Justus. He was one of the Greeks who worshipped God, and his house was adjoining to the synagogue. Thus the apostle practically declared, both that he went over to the Gentiles, and that the Mosaic law ceased to be binding; for in the house of a Gentile, it could scarcely be kept. We were before told, that he had persuaded Jews, as well as Greeks; and now we are informed that even "Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, with all his house," which deserves special notice; because, in the cases of Lydia and the jailor, those two only are said to have believed, though

it is declared that their houses were baptized. If the families had believed, and this was the reason why they were baptized, we should surely have been informed of it, in the first instance. Many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed, and were baptized. Of their households, nothing is said.

In this important city, destined to be the seat of a celebrated church, Christ saw fit to appear to his apostle, for his special encouragement against the opposition and blasphemy of the Jews. The Lord said, by vision at night, to Paul, "Fear not: but speak, and be not silent; because I am with thee, and no one shall set on thee, to injure thee; because I have much people in this city." This occurred, probably, the first night Paul lodged in the house of Justus, with a spirit wounded at the thought of his gloomy farewell to the Jews, at the next door. If he expected their attacks when they should assemble in the synagogue, and find him lodging with a converted Greek; he was bidden not to be afraid; and for a reason that was most important, that he might continue to speak, when, otherwise, he might be silent, through fear, as well as sorrow; for he told the Corinthians, "I was with you in weakness, and fear, and much trembling." "I was dumb with grief," said the Psalmist; "I held my peace, even from good." But our Lord deigned to give a reason why Paul should speak: "Because I am with thee." Then who shall be against thee? The special assurance and experience of Christ's presence is enough to fortify his ministers against a world of foes; and now Paul could give the Corinthians "proofs of Christ speaking in him." No man shall set on thee, to injure thee, as we have often seen the enemy doing in other places; but here we shall behold him labouring amidst infuriate Jews, for a long time, unhurt. The charm of this assurance was in the close; "because I have much people in this city." This numerous people are said to belong to Christ, ere yet they were called; and, therefore, Paul must speak, to call them to the knowledge of Christ. But are not they who know, believe, love, and obey, Christ's people? No others can be recognised by us as his people. But *he* says, "All that the Father giveth me, shall come to me. Thine they were, and thou gavest them *me*; and thou hast given me power over all flesh, that I should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given me." We know none as the sheep of the Good Shep-

herd, but those whom he thus describes : “ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me ;” yet, *he* says, “ Other sheep I have, who are not of this fold ; them also I must bring ; and they *shall* hear my voice.” These called his sheep, because given to him, must be brought into his fold ; Christ here calls them his people ; and Paul must speak because they must hear, and become his believing and obedient people. “ Therefore,” says the apostle, “ I endure all things for the elect’s sake, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.”

He continued, or, as the Greek expresses it, “ sat down,” there, a year and six months, “ teaching among them the word of God.” Here was altar against altar ; next door to the synagogue, the Christian church ; in the house of Justus, the converted Greek, there was Crispus, the former chief of the synagogue of the Jews ; and thus the city of Corinth saw the new covenant superseding the old, as Paul taught them in his Second Epistle (chapter iii.). He who had been driven from place to place, and scarcely allowed time to breathe, here enjoyed a year and a half, not of leisure, but of continuous labour, in a splendid city, the seat of the Roman government among the Greeks. For now the apostle to the Gentiles was in his own diocese. Eighteen months, however, have run out, and we again hear the voice that once said, “ Get ye up ; ye have tarried long enough about this mountain.”

III. THE PERSECUTIONS RENEWED. Ver. 12.

These will lead us to notice their attacks, the apostle’s departure to Asia, and the episode concerning Apollos.

1. *The attack of the Jews.* Ver. 12. “ When Gallio was Proconsul of Achaia, in which Corinth stood, the Jews, with one accord, fell on Paul and led him to the tribunal.” This Gallio was the brother of the famous Stoic, Seneca, but had taken the name of one who adopted him. Seneca and others describe him as one on whose kindness I suspect the Jews hoped to impose. The accuracy of Luke is observable, for only now was it correct to speak of the Deputy or Proconsul of Achaia. In saying that “ this man, contrary to law, persuades men to worship God,” the Jews remind us how they were themselves banished from Rome, and were worshipping con-

trary to its laws. This, certainly, did not escape Gallio's discernment. For, when Paul was only "*about* to open his mouth," in his own defence, "Gallio said to the Jews, If, indeed, there were any injustice or wicked fraud, O Jews, according to reason, I would bear with you. But, if it is a question concerning a word and names, and a law that is among you, see to it yourselves; for a judge of such things I do not choose to be. And he drove them from the tribunal." Here was more good sense than the governors of the world have usually displayed. Gallio declared that civil suits were all that civil governors could reasonably be called to decide; to see that neither open insolence, nor injurious deceits, should be practised upon society; but that it did not become the magistrate to judge of questions of religion, which often turn upon a word and upon names, (alluding, perhaps, to that of Christ, or Messiah,) and upon a Divine law which men may have among themselves. "Settle that among yourselves," says the Proconsul. They, however, seem to have refused to listen to this mild and rational sentence; and to have lingered, as if demanding his interference; so that he was induced to call in the lictors, and drive them away. Thus our Lord fulfilled his promise, that none should set on Paul to injure him.

"Then, all the Greeks, having taken Sosthenes, the chief of the synagogue, beat him before the tribunal; but Gallio cared nothing for these things." The biter was bitten. For, notwithstanding Paley's note, I suppose that when Crispus, the former chief, believed, and joined the church in the house of Justus, the Jews set Sosthenes in his place, as a more determined unbeliever; and that he, called the ruler of the synagogue, to distinguish him from the one who joined Paul, led the prosecution; but the Greeks, who were spectators, seeing how contemptuously it was dismissed, exulted over the Jews; and, when these were driven away, took the law into their own hands, and beat the leading prosecutor. He may afterwards have become a Christian brother. 1 Cor. i. 1. For caring nothing about it, Gallio has become a name for the careless. He, probably, thought the Jews were rightly served, for having interfered with Paul, and brought him to the tribunal; and when the officers were driving them away, laughed at the vengeance inflicted by Greeks on Jews. It did not,

however, become a magistrate to look with indifference on mob-law, even though it should happen to be substantially on the right side. But into the pit which the Jews digged for Paul, they themselves fell; for, instead of the chief of the Christians, the chief of the synagogue was beaten; and thus Christ's promise was fulfilled to Paul.

You will not be surprised to learn that Gallionism became a term among the Germans for indifferentism, thus defined: "A new art of pseudo-politics, the offspring of atheistic carelessness, or supine indolence, neglect and ignorance of controversies of faith and religion, making a show of peace and simplicity, but really the murderer of conscience, the asylum of ignorance, the mother of apostasy, and the road to atheism." In terms so severe, even Protestants have condemned Gallio for confining himself as a magistrate to civil causes, and leaving men to settle their religious disputes among themselves. What does it avail to call kings defenders of the faith, and most religious and gracious? Can any good come from hypocrisy and telling lies to God? Was Charles II., or was religion, the better for his interference with it, as "our most religious and gracious king?" But is the accusation true? Is the magistrate necessarily indifferent to everything which he refuses to regulate by law? May he not decline to interfere; because religion is too delicate, too difficult, too important, for human laws? Is there nothing so high, that it must be left to the tribunal of the Omniscient? Are kings omniscient? Is not the philosophy of the solar system, or the magic of chemistry, important? Are we indifferent to these things, because we do not imitate the Pope in compelling Galileo to lie against his better knowledge, and say that the earth stands still? The whole conduct of the apostles in refusing to obey the magistrates, who, in Judea, commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and who, in Rome, decreed that no God should be worshipped that was not sanctioned by the Senate, proves that the civil powers were not entrusted with authority in religion. For there cannot be two conflicting legitimate authorities. If we are not bound to obey, they are not authorised to command; and, therefore, the apostles put it to their own judgment and conscience, saying, "Whether it be right, in the sight of God, to hearken to you more than to God, judge ye." If, in the affairs of this

life, we obey magistrates, while, in those of the life to come, we hearken to God alone; "we render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's." Gallio, thou hast shared the lot of those who are condemned for being wise beyond their age.

2. *Paul's departure for Asia.* After remaining some days, to prepare for his removal, and to show that he was not fleeing from justice or from persecution, the apostle, "having taken leave of the brethren, sailed to Syria." He had passed some of the most eventful years of his life, from the time he was called into Europe, by the voice, "Come over to Macedonia;" and now the churches in Asia, the cradle of our religion, required his presence and care. "He took with him Priscilla and Aquila, having shorn his head in Cenchrea," the eastern port of Corinth, where he embarked; "for he had a vow." This vow has created much discussion, most writers ascribing it to Paul; but I, though not without doubt, ascribe it to Aquila. For Priscilla, contrary to the usual and natural order, is mentioned first, apparently because the vow is ascribed to Aquila, the immediate antecedent. It is, however, observed that the female stands first, in Rom. xvi. 3, 4, where no such reason can be assigned. But there may be another, for she may have had the precedence in "laying down the neck for Paul's life." Of the vow supposed to be referred to, and cutting off the hair, you read in Numbers vi.

Paul is then said to have come to Ephesus, afterwards famous for its flourishing church, and to have left them, Aquila and Priscilla, there; perhaps on account of Aquila's vow; and the apostle, having entered into the synagogue, discoursed with the Jews. They seem to have received him favourably; for "they asking him to remain a longer time with them, he consented not; but bade them farewell, saying, It is absolutely necessary for me to keep the approaching feast at Jerusalem; but I will return to you, if God be willing; and he sailed from Ephesus."

Those who ascribe the vow to Paul, suppose that this created the necessity for going to Jerusalem; but neither he, nor his subsequent conduct, says any such thing. He may have deemed it necessary, after such a sojourn in Gentile Europe, to revisit Jerusalem at the sacred season, in order to show his regard for

his nation and its law; and to give the Christian church an account of what God had wrought by him among the Gentiles. The visit is ascribed to the feast, and not to the vow.

Having sailed along the coast, and gone down to Cesarea, as his port for disembarking, and gone up and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch. Jerusalem is here strangely omitted; and most writers have as strangely assumed, that it was intended, where the church is mentioned. To me, it appears, that he went up from the shore, and saluted the church at Cesarea. He may there have received information which altered his plan, and sent him to Antioch. After some delay there, he went forth on another tour among the Gentiles, passing in order through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. This second visit to Galatia seems to have revealed the evil influence of the Jewish Christians, who, zealots for the law and circumcision, had alienated some minds from the apostle, as he shows in the Epistle to the Galatians. But his visit strengthened all the disciples, who much needed confirmation in their new faith, when controversies arose.

IV. THE EPISODE OF APOLLOS.

"A certain Jew, Apollos by name, an Alexandrian by descent, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus, being mighty in the Scriptures." Some think that he was called Apollo by the Greeks, on account of his eloquence; but, though a Jew by blood and religion, he was descended from the numerous class of that nation who had settled at Alexandria, in consequence of the privileges which Alexander conferred on the Jewish colony he planted there. Alexandria was early the seat of one of the largest Christian churches, which claimed Mark as its founder, and gloried in such teachers as Pantæus, Origen, Clement, and, above all, Athanasius. But the philosophising spirit of that city early infected the catechetical school of the Christians at Alexandria, which became a fountain of corruption to the church. Here, the famous Arius began his war against the divinity of Christ.

Of Apollos, it is said, "This man was taught the way of the Lord," where Luke employs the word which gave rise to our term, catechise; "and, being fervent in the spirit, he used to

speaking and teaching accurately the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John." Christ's forerunner was celebrated among the Jews, who owned him for a prophet; and the ancestors of Apollos had probably acquired, through John, a knowledge of the Messiah's speedy appearance; but had not, at Alexandria, obtained an acquaintance with the Messiah himself. Apollos, well catechised, was mighty as far as the Scriptures of the Old Testament could make him, so that he could accurately teach, from them, the way of the Lord, by showing all they taught of the Lord Jesus; though knowing nothing more than John had published, which, being sealed by the rite he administered, is called the baptism of John. A Jew, who had not become acquainted with Christ, might, from the Old Testament, show many things concerning him.

"This man began to be bold in the Jews' synagogue, at Ephesus; but Aquila and Priscilla, hearing him there, and perceiving his defect in knowledge, and his excellent spirit, took him to their home, and more accurately unfolded to him the way of God."

There is great beauty in this narrative; for it shows how much grace there may be with imperfect knowledge, and how true is our God to his word, "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord; his going forth is prepared as the morning, shining more and more to the perfect day." Use well the knowledge you have, and you shall have more. Labour while you live, and you shall do good when you are dead. For John the Baptist was cut off by an early death; but we find the benefit of his instructions in Apollos, many years after. The conduct of Aquila and Priscilla is an example to any one who is blessed with that superior knowledge, which they doubtless increased by hospitality to an apostle. Far from despising one their inferior, or contradicting him in public, they took him home, and instructed him privately, knowing that if you "give instruction to a wise man, he will be yet wiser; teach a just man, and he will increase in learning." Here the female joined in instructing "an eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures, and bold to declare all he knew." For the Christian religion exalts to their due rank that sex which is fellow-heir with man in the grace of life; and woman becomes, by private means, suited to female modesty, if not a preacher, a blessing to preachers. She

may say, like an ancient female confessor, "I can die for Christ." As we find Priscilla stands first, in Rom. xvi. 3, 4.

"Apollos now wishing to cross over into Achaia, the brethren, having forwarded it, wrote to the disciples to receive him, who, being come thither, contributed much to those who had believed through grace. For he strenuously convinced the Jews, in public, demonstrating, by the Scriptures, the Messiah to be Jesus." The wish to go into Achaia may have arisen in the mind of Apollos from his having been there before, and imparted defective instructions, which he wished to improve, now that he was better informed. In furthering his purpose, the brethren teach us to bring forward to usefulness a promising man, though but recently acquainted with the truth, that he may prove himself fit for the ministry, to which the Lord appears to design him. Apollos was not in office, though a preacher. His usefulness to those who had believed through grace, shows that recent converts may, by prior advantages, be fitted to aid their seniors in the church; and that it is the grace of God which causes us to believe; for "faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God." But his convincing the Jews is mentioned, as if this were the aid given to Christians, who are always profited when others are converted; and the use which Apollos made of the Scriptures is displayed, to show that his prior gifts turned to good account, when endued with further knowledge.

See why the apostle says to the Corinthians, "Paul planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." The founding of the church at Corinth is a key to the two epistles sent to them, on which a knowledge of the city will often throw light. For the sins censured by the apostle were those of the place and age, from which Christians are not, even by their conversion, instantaneously delivered. The same state of things, afterwards gave rise to the earliest and most valuable of the writings of the fathers,—the Epistle of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians, written on account of their turbulent conduct, in displacing their ministers without cause. For they who glory in men, saying, "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas," prove as fickle as they are vain, and dash down the idol they set up. What are called primitive Christians, are neither infallible guides nor immaculate patterns.

The much-mistaken passage in 1 Corinthians iii., which compares the church to a building, was designed to guard them, not against false doctrine, but a corrupt, because promiscuous, communion. They had not "put away from among themselves the wicked person. These were the wood, hay, and stubble, which the fire would try and destroy; and those who built up the church with such materials, would find their work burned."

The reference to the Isthmian Games, in the ninth chapter, is well known to arise from the celebration of them, by an assemblage from the Grecian states, at the Isthmus, on which Corinth stood.

If these remarks should lead the reader to make the Acts of the Apostles an expositor of their Epistles, I shall have given the best practical application of this Lecture; which being the twenty-first, is worthy of special notice; for at Corinth the first of the inspired epistles was written to the Thessalonians. The Postscript to these Epistles says, "Athens," which is a mistake, for the chapter which we have now considered declares, that Silas and Timothy, from Macedonia, joined Paul at Corinth; and to the Thessalonians, Paul says, "When Timothy came from you to us, we were comforted." 1 Thess. iii. 6. Of two things, therefore, I wish my hearers to be aware,—that the Postscripts to the Epistles are human additions, of no authority; and that the Epistles are not placed in our Bibles in the order in which they were written. Those to the Thessalonians were the first sent; but that to the church at Rome stands first, because the collection was made there.

An appendix to this Lecture is demanded by the special instruction which we derive from the Epistles written at Corinth. For here we learn the essential equality of distinct churches. Of this doctrine Christians soon lost sight, though it is wrought into the very texture of the Christian Scriptures. How came we to receive the Epistles to the Thessalonians as the word of God? The letters were sent to a single church. That church was the depository of them, as Israel was of "the lively oracles which Moses received to give to us." Other churches derived from that one the letters designed for the use of all. Whoever reads them as the revelation from heaven, virtually, if not intentionally, acknowledges that God dealt with the church at Thessalonica as a distinct body, to be recognised as a complete church,

to whom he sent his word ; and to be honoured as such, however small, by all who honour the Holy Spirit, who twice in the Holy Scriptures addressed "the church of the Thessalonians." When it was asked, "What advantage have the Jews?" an apostle answers, "Much: chiefly, because to them were committed the oracles of God." We honour the Jewish church as the depository of this treasure, more glorious than the land flowing with milk and honey ; for we receive all those, and only those, oracles which that church has handed down to us. Do we not thus honour the single independent church of the Thessalonians ?

What higher evidence has Rome itself that heaven ever owned it as a church, and called others to recognise it, by receiving the lively oracles delivered to her ? Some may say she has less evidence, in her one Epistle, than Thessalonica in her two ; and the divine word was sent first to the Thessalonians. But Philippi, Corinth, Colosse, and the seven churches of Asia, all proclaim the distinct independency of churches recognised by heaven, and acknowledged by the other churches, who received from them the inspired writings with which they were entrusted, to be by them handed down to every succeeding age.

The inspired Scriptures we receive from those to whom they were originally addressed and sent ; therefore, to a great extent, from *distinct* churches ; I might have said *independent*, but that word ill becomes mortals, whether individuals or churches ; yet, as far as any church can be independent, such were the single congregations of Thessalonica or Philippi. In receiving as divine the Epistles addressed to them, we honour the principle of congregational churches.

LECTURE XXII.

PAUL AT EPHEBUS.

ACTS xix.

To Ephesus, celebrated for its temple ; as to Athens, renowned for its university ; and to Corinth, admired for its architecture ; the apostle of the Gentiles was conducted, that he might attack idolatry in its strongest holds. We find him bringing the light of the Gospel to bear on every degree of darkness ; from the dimness of John the Baptist's dispensation, to the "blindness in part which happened to Israel," and the gloomy midnight of the worship of Diana of the Ephesians. With a large field opening to us, we proceed at once to consider these in their order.

I. THE TWILIGHT OF THE DISCIPLES OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. Ver. 7.

Josephus occasionally discovers to us effects of John the Baptist's ministry ; and we have already seen one of a pleasing character in the case of Apollos.

"It happened that, while Paul was at Corinth, to which we followed him in the last Lecture, having gone through the upper or northern parts of Asia, and especially Phrygia and Galatia, to which we last saw him journeying from Antioch, he came southward and westward to Ephesus ; as he had promised

the Jews there, if that Lord, to whose will he referred all his movements, should so please. And having found certain disciples, he said to them, "Received ye the Holy Spirit, having believed? But they said to him, (No), but neither have we heard if the Holy Spirit is (received)." The difficulties of this passage are increased to the reader of an English translation, by what I may call the impossibility of a perfect one. The Greek definite article, which points out the person of the Holy Spirit, is not found in the original; and the whole narrative shows that the effusion of the Spirit, which frequently *followed* believing, is the object of inquiry. But, as it would scarcely be intelligible to say, "Have ye received *a* Holy Spirit," we must adopt a paraphrase, rather than a translation, and render the passage thus: "Have ye received a baptism of the Spirit since ye believed? And they said, We have not even heard that the Holy Spirit is thus *received*." As in John vii. 39, "The Spirit was not yet;" we read, "not yet *given*;" it should be, *received*. That they knew there was a Holy Spirit, in some sense, we must conclude, if they knew John's baptism, with its attendant preaching, which expressly declared that Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit. They had not heard that this was yet fulfilled. They appeared as disciples who believed. Where could they have been, that they had not heard of the baptism of the Holy Spirit being granted? The intercourse of mankind was not so easy in those days as in ours. What the apostle elicited does not explain the affair to us. "And he said to them, Unto what, then, were ye baptized? But they said, Unto the baptism of John. But Paul said, John, indeed, baptized a baptism of repentance, speaking to the people, that on him that cometh after him they might believe; that is, on the Messiah, Jesus. And they, having heard, were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus." Baptism is spoken of here, as well as in the commission to the apostles, not as we read, "baptize *in*," but *into*, or unto the name; as if to show that baptism is dedication "to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit." To be baptized into the baptism of John, was to be devoted to the instruction, or teaching, of John. The apostle then informs these persons that the teaching of John was to lead them further, and hand them on "to believe on him that was coming after;" that is, the

Messiah, or Christ, which signifies the anointed with the Spirit, without measure, from whom the anointing was to descend on us.

I suspect these twelve were of that spurious sect, which seems to have arisen from a perversion of John's baptism, which may account for their ignorance, and their subsequent baptism, as men who had hitherto known neither John nor Jesus. Apollos, who really knew the baptism of John, and the way of the Lord, though imperfectly, was not afterwards baptized. They who were, are called disciples, because they assembled with the Christians to learn; and when Paul says, "Since ye believed," as one just arrived, he speaks of things as they appeared. What *they* called John's baptism, was neither administered by John, or his real disciples, nor administered while John's baptism was valid; but after it had been superseded by Christian baptism; and, therefore, the apostle considered them unbaptized. Now they believed on Christ.

"And Paul having laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied." The person of the Spirit being now intended, the article is introduced. A special descent of the Holy Spirit, to impart the miraculous gifts of tongues and prophecy, followed the laying on of the hands of apostles only; as was seen by Simon at Samaria. The gift of speaking various languages, to spread the Gospel among nations who could understand it, only in their own tongue, needs no explanation. Not so the gift of prophecy, which seems to signify, at one time, the prediction of future events; at another, the interpretation of the prophecies of Scripture; and, at a third, the gift of preaching in general, but perhaps, under a special inspiration.

Here, they whose heads are full of false notions of baptism, and of religion in general, have said things strangely foolish. "John baptized to repentance, for the remission of actual sin; but Christ, with the Holy Ghost and fire, which, through the grace communicated by it, took away original sin, and impressed the image of God." Yet the descent of the Holy Spirit, here, was not in baptism, but after it; and the same gift was, in the house of Cornelius, imparted *before* baptism; so that Peter asks, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit, even as we?"

alluding to their speaking with tongues, as at Pentecost. For this gift of the Spirit was not that which made men Christians, disciples, or believers; but that which endued them with miraculous powers for the confirmation and propagation of the Gospel, and is not now to be expected.

Actual sin, remitted by John's baptism; but the stain of original sin remitted, and the image of God restored to our nature, by Christ's baptism! Then, those who died, after having their actual sins remitted, could not be condemned for them at God's bar; but they could not be accepted, for they had the stain of original sin, and were destitute of a nature renewed after God's image! Whither must they go? To heaven or to hell? To neither, upon this hypothesis; which must create a new world. And, again, these disciples of John, being already forgiven, need no pardon of actual sins by Christ, when they receive baptism from him; but receive only the remission of original sin, the removal of that stain, and the grace of the Holy Spirit to impart the image of God! But what sort of pardoned creatures are they who are under all the stain of original sin, by which "the carnal mind is enmity against God, and cannot please God," and are destitute of that grace of the Holy Spirit, which "renews the heart after the image of God, that consists in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness." The doctrine of the Scripture is free from this inextricable confusion, declaring, that, while out of Christ, we are all under sin; and, when united to Christ, there is no condemnation; for we have passed from death to life: "Ye are washed, ye are justified, ye are sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God." The New Testament knows no state in which some sins are forgiven, but not all.

When it is said, "All the men were about twelve;" some may say, "How can this record profess to be inspired? Did not the Spirit of God know the exact number?" We answer, Yes; but it does not follow that he must tell us exactly how many they were. But we have seen the Greek particle, *ὥς*, "as it were," used where it is not required by our language to be introduced at all, and, therefore, the Syriac says simply "twelve." Such a number of disciples, endued with miraculous gifts, was intended for the furtherance of the Gospel, in a city so important as Ephesus. The strong sensation created here may have arisen

from the extraordinary power of speaking various tongues and prophesying, in a city full of false pretences, which served to show the glory of true miracles.

II. THE DARKNESS OF THE JEWS PAUL NOW SOUGHT TO INSTRUCT.

On his first visit to this city, they entreated the apostle to stay longer with them, but, in the interval, some of the better disposed may have departed ; or, the worst portion, hearing of his intention to return, employed the opportunity, afforded by his absence, to make the general mind evil affected towards the disciples and the Saviour.

1. *See the conflict between sin and grace.* Ver. 8. Paul, "having entered into the synagogue, was emboldened, discoursing for three months, and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God." Three months was so long a time for the apostle, whom the Jews so virulently opposed, to maintain his discussions in the synagogue, that the better disposition, which received him at first, must have exerted some influence still. The persuasion that he so boldly employed concerning the kingdom of God, on which the Jews loved to dwell, unfolded its spiritual nature, as opposed to the carnal expectation of a worldly empire, and showed its superior glory, as a dominion over the heart, which was beautifully exemplified in the twelve new converts, whose power to speak in various tongues and prophesy, proved the fulfilment of Joel's words, to which the apostles appealed at Pentecost.

"But as some were hardened, and did not believe, calumniating the way before the multitude, he, departing from them, separated the disciples, daily discoursing in the school of one Tyrannus."

Hardness of heart, and unbelief, its offspring, are ascribed to some only ; but they were violent, and said evil things of *the way*, which is a frequent expression for our religion, the way of salvation. The multitude were injured by hearing these calumnies, which a hardened unbeliever can easily invent, though without a shadow of reason, or evidence ; and the apostle, quitting the synagogue, took with him those who had become disciples to Christ, that they might be instructed further in the truth, without being wounded by the sound of blasphemy and lies. Thus the Ephesian church was constituted by

2. *A separation from the world.* A church is a congregation of the faithful, called out from the ruined mass. The *school* mentioned, is an adoption rather than a translation of the Greek word, which was used in so many senses, that we cannot say whether it signified a public court, or a private lecture-room. The latter seems probable, from its being said to belong to one Tyrannus; whose name, again, might express office, as the Greeks called the rulers of an oligarchy tyrants; but, like our word King, it may have been merely a proper name.

This daily ministry of the apostle lasted "for two years; so that all who dwelt in Asia, proconsular, heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." Ephesus was a place of such resort, on various accounts, but especially for the sake of its most celebrated temple, that we are told, our "Lord here set before his apostle a great door and effectual." The opportunity which all had of hearing his word, for two years, shows that where the fittest stage was enjoyed, there time was given to investigate the truth, and sift its evidence to the utmost.

"But God was exercising no ordinary powers by the hands of Paul; so that, even upon the sick, were laid, from his body, handkerchiefs, or sashes, and the sickness departed from them, and evil spirits went out." The word "aprons" is applied by some to the workman's apron, which Paul, as a tent-maker, wore; but, I think, the original expresses that cincture with which the orientals gird their loose dress.

Some of the wandering exorcist Jews undertook to name over those who had evil spirits, the name of Jesus, saying, "I adjure you, by Jesus, whom Paul preaches. And there were certain sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, seven, who were doing this." There are many proofs that the Jews, when cast off, became an abandoned people, given to all kinds of evil arts, for gain. Juvenal satirises the Roman ladies for consulting Jewesses, who acted as fortune-telling gipsies. In Ephesus, charms and incantations were so rife, that they were called Ephesian letters. It was specially disgraceful that the sons of a priest, one of the chiefs of his order, should act this false part; for that they did not believe in Jesus, their conduct proves; so that they must have been either strangely infatuated with the notion of the magic virtue of a name, or must have been ready to pretend to anything, for gain.

But, while pursuing their nefarious practices, perhaps not without some malicious design towards the apostle, God overruled it for the furtherance of the Gospel. "The evil spirit, answering, said, That Jesus I know, and that Paul I am acquainted with; but you—who are you?" "The man in whom the evil spirit was, leaping on them, having mastered them, was violent against them; so that, naked and wounded, they fled from that house." In the life of Christ, we find evil spirits saying to him, "We know thee, who thou art;" and here they are compelled to own they know his apostle too. But when they say, "Who are ye?" they bid defiance, not to the name of Jesus, but to the utterance of it by such lips, for the purposes of imposture, or gain. The power which the Gospels exhibit in the possessed, to burst fetters, was here employed, by one, to master seven, and tear off their clothes, and wound their bodies. Thus God showed that the miracles of Paul were not the effect of a magical power in the name he employed, nor of any compact with the devil. "For this was known to all the Jews and the Greeks, who dwelt at Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all; and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified."

We can scarcely read of the crime, or punishment, of those who profaned the name of Jesus, without horror; nor think of the glory which it threw around the name of our Lord Jesus, without grateful admiration. Jews and Greeks might shudder; Christians must exult. If enemies exclaimed, "How terrible is that Jesus to dæmons, whom he holds in a chain, and gives power over them to his friends; though he lets them loose upon his foes;" Christians might shout, "Now is the judgment of this world; now is the prince of this world cast out. See Satan fall as lightning from heaven." Blessed name, that fills the church above, and the church below, with power and joy; and fills earth and hell with wild dismay! Oh, magnify the name of the Lord Jesus, by reposing in it a boundless faith, to save from all the might and malice of hell; but never dare employ it, except in obedience to his will, and for his own glory.

The state of the public mind at Ephesus is now unfolded, to show the wisdom that suffered these things to occur there. "For many of those who had believed, came confessing and relating their practices; and a considerable number of those who had practised (magical) arts, having brought, burned the books, before

all; and they calculated their prices, and found them fifty thousand pieces of silver. So much in force the word of the Lord increased and prevailed." Magic being confessedly a secret art, whether it assumed the grosser form of ancient times, pretending to invoke the aid of dæmons, or, that in our days, called dealing with the devil; or whether it wore the more innocent garb, called natural magic, or sleight of hand, it is always difficult to describe. That it prevailed among the heathen is notorious, and we have seen that the prescribed forms, called Ephesian letters, spoke its prevalence in that city. Wonder, therefore, not that many of the recent converts had been professed magicians, but that they had been subdued by the power of the Gospel, and pardoned, after such a life, which usually hardens the heart, and gives up the deceiver to the power of his own delusions. When the judgment which had seized the sons of Sceva roused attention to heaven's frown on such pretences; looking back on them with new eyes, the converts could not be easy till they had made an humble confession and publicly renounced their diabolical trade. Hear them describe their tricks, and lay naked the curious compound of ignorant infatuation and artful imposture, by which they had transferred money from fools to knaves. For when the books, which had been the tools of their trade, cost fifty thousand pounds, what must have been their gains! I mention pounds, as, perhaps, nearly correspondent in value to what the historian intends; for *pieces*, which our translators have introduced, are not in the original, and the word "silver," seems to be employed as it is by the French, for money. Taken in the ordinary way, the sum has been variously estimated £300, £1,500, and £6,000. If any say, it was a pity to destroy documents so precious, which might have afforded much instructive antiquarian lore; *they* said, "Perish all records of the black art from the face of the earth. Better books burn than we! They have deceived us and our age; they shall deceive no more." Thus infidel books have, in modern days, been burned by Christian converts; but, oh, we blush to tell, that thus the Bible itself is burnt by the priests of Antichrist. The epistles of Paul and the life of Jesus, treated as Ephesian letters, by those who say, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know!"

The force of the divine word is magnified by the sacred his-

torian, as displayed in the publicity of the transaction; for, a bonfire, made before all, of the books which had been so highly valued in that city, must have excited a powerful sensation, and put to the test the courage of those who had embraced the new faith. But they must have been numerous, that their books should be valued at such a sum; and their numbers, probably, awed the professors of the same arts, who might also be afraid that, if they stirred up opposition, it would lead to more disgraceful exposures. Alas! that among professed Christians, conjuring, and fortune-telling, and pretences to raising evil spirits, have prevailed to this day. Learn, from the Ephesian converts, to pour on such delusions deserved contempt.

"But when these events were completed, Paul determined, through the Spirit, having gone through Macedonia and Achaia, to proceed to Jerusalem; saying, that, after my being there, it is necessary for me to see Rome also." It has been thought that the death of Claudius, who had driven away Aquila and Priscilla, induced Paul now to think of Rome. We find him saying, "Now I go bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem;" which shows that he was under a divine impulse; moving towards the goal where he should finish his course. But, as he said also, "Not knowing the things that shall befall me there;" so we know that his seeing Rome was far different from what, in his Epistle to the Romans, he anticipates. He was to see it, not as a voluntary visitor, but as a prisoner of state.

"But, having sent into Macedonia two of those that ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself spent some time upon Asia." The two attendants were to prepare his way, that "the contributions which he intended to carry to the poor saints at Jerusalem," might be ready. But as his own delay is said to have been devoted to Asia, and not merely to Ephesus, we are reminded that, in the tenth verse, it was said, that all the inhabitants of Asia (proconsular) heard the word of the Lord. He seems, therefore, to have made Ephesus a centre, whence he shed the beams of instruction in every direction, returning to the city, after each excursion.

III. THE MIDNIGHT DARKNESS OF HEATHENISM.

It was scarcely to be expected that such triumphs as we have beheld, should be achieved at Ephesus, without a fierce contest.

The shame poured upon Jews, the sons of a priest, who were base enough to be professors of the black art, doubtless rankled in Jewish breasts; but the laws, which forbade these practices, compelled them to conceal their indignation, and tied the hands that would have torn Paul to pieces. A more popular occasion was afforded for the display of heathen passions, which had *long* been pent up in the breasts of idolaters. In Ephesus, which was to the heathen, almost what Rome is to the papal world, there must have been multitudes, not only of individuals, but of families, supported by superstition, whose alarm for their threatened interests show,

1. *How the tumult was excited.* "But there was, at that time, no small disturbance concerning the way. For one, named Demetrius, a silversmith, making Diana's silver temples, procured to the artificers no small wages, whom, having collected, and the workmen in such employments, he said, My men, ye know that from this work is our livelihood. And you see, and hear, that, not only at Ephesus, but almost in all Asia, this Paul, having persuaded, has withdrawn a considerable multitude, saying, that they are not gods that are made by hands. But, not only this business of ours is in danger of coming into disrepute; but even the great goddess Diana's temple of being reckoned for nothing, and her magnificence of being next destroyed, which all Asia and the world worships. But they, having heard, and being full of wrath, cried, saying, Great the Diana of the Ephesians!"

"And the whole city was filled with confusion; and they rushed, with one consent, into the theatre, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's fellow-travellers. But, Paul wishing to enter in to the people, the disciples suffered him not. Some even of the magistrates, called Asiarchs, being friends to him, having sent to him, exhorted him not to trust himself into the theatre," where they might not be able to defend him. The best comment on this passage is a view of the city and temple and theatre, as given in the narrative of a modern traveller.

Diana is the Roman name, but the Greek is Artemis, for the moon, adored as a goddess, the patroness of hunting and chastity.

For shrines, the original has "temples," silver miniatures, with moveable doors, which opened, to show the idol in miniature.

Demetrius, and the workmen of a large manufactory of these, were naturally alarmed, though we are delighted, that Paul turned away much people from such gods. Ephesus lived, as Rome does, by its idols. Loretto is resorted to, for the sake of the Santa Casa, and the image of our Lady. Monks extol the relic that brings gain to their monastery. The wild beasts, kept for theatrical display, were to be let loose on Paul; but even those who presided over these shows, begged him not to venture where they might not be able to protect him from the cry that soon was raised against the Christians, “Ad leones!” “to the lions!” often in spite of the efforts of humane magistrates. The cry seems to mean, what, in modern phrase, would be, “The great Ephesian Diana for ever!”

The assembly is called, ἐκκλησία, “the church;” so little sanction is given in Scripture to a superstitious regard for technical terms. The greater part knew not for what they were assembled. Alexander (son of Simon, bearer of Christ’s cross?), known by the Jews to be a Christian, was pushed forward by them, to bear the brunt. But, when he waved his hand to be allowed to speak, the people, knowing him to be a Jew, by birth, raised the cry as against Jewish despisers of idols; and kept it up, two hours, to prevent a reply.

2. *See how the tumult was hushed.* The word γραμματεὺς, translated “town-clerk,” expresses, like clergy, literature, and is variously rendered, scribe, secretary, and, by Luther, chancellor. “Recorder” best suits him who delivered the following oration:—“Ephesians, who, then, is the man who knows not the city of the Ephesians, as being the temple-keeper of the great Artemis, and of the Jove-fallen (image)?” The word which strictly signifies *temple-sweeper*, I have rendered keeper, as a chapel-keeper would be its sweeper. Cities contended for the honour of being the warden of the temple, which Ephesus claimed, and usually possessed, as was natural; though it was made the *common* bank of *Asia*, by whose contributions it was reared. Medals and ancient histories confirm the statements here given by Luke.

The image of Diana is said to have been of the wood of the vine, of olive, cedar, ebony; but Xenophon, who probably saw it, says it was of gold, with which it may have been overlaid. Herodian coolly says of one image, that “the Romans sent for

it, to secure their empire: no one knows the workman, or material; though it is said to have fallen from heaven into a field in Phrygia." Lib. i. 35. The maker of Diana is reported to have been murdered, that his work might be passed off as divine; though it was an ugly block, of which its author might be ashamed. But, since the fall, men seem to have thought ugliness an attribute of deity; and the original block at Ephesus was overlaid with offensive forms.

All that the recorder's oration asserts is—no one could be ignorant that the Ephesians were guardians of the temple and its image; saying nothing of his own opinions, or their reasons. "These things, therefore, being incontrovertible, it is your duty to be quieted, and practise nothing rash. For you have brought these men, who are neither sacrilegious, nor are blaspheming your deity." "Robbers of churches" is a gross mistranslation. There were, at that time, no buildings called churches, and, if there had been, the Ephesians would not have cared who robbed them; but the recorder reminded them that the Christians had not sacrilegiously plundered their temple, blaspheming their goddess.

"If, therefore, Demetrius, and the artificers with him, have a suit against any, there are courts held, and there are proconsuls: let them sue one another. But if you are disputing on other things, it shall be settled in a lawful assembly. For we, also, are in danger of being accused of a riot, on account of this day; there being no cause to enable us to give account for this concourse: and having said these things, he dismissed the church;" for Luke here employs the usual word for church. There is so much good sense in this speech, that it might have been delivered by Paul himself; for the orator evidently had no faith in Diana, or her image. The advice to be quiet and do nothing rash, has become proverbial; and Christians might learn from the recorder of Ephesus, who, by dissolving the assembly, saved the city from riot and blood. He was, probably, like the Asiarchs, friendly to Paul. Happy they, who have such magistrates!

1. *See the rise of that church to which Paul wrote the Epistle that bears the name of the Ephesians.* Read what is said there of a temple more glorious than that of Diana—a living temple for the living God. Observe how our religion rose, not in the rustic ignorance of villages, but in the first cities of the most

cultivated region and era, to confront idolatry in all its glory. Had heathens chosen for themselves the battle-field, where they might fight it out for victory, or death, they might have taken their stand by "Artemis, whom all Asia and the world worshipped." For two years, Paul waved there the banner of defiance to all the gods of the Pantheon. And where were their advocates, the eloquent orators, their logical demonstrations? "By this craft we have our living." Thus has Christianity ever beaten false religion out of the field of argument, showing at once that it has nothing to say for itself. Errors flee before the truth, as owls and bats from the rising sun.

2. *Learn here what we owe to an idolatrous world.* Not the spurious candour which, in spite of evidence, denies that the heathen can be so stupid as to worship idols, and affirms that the same being is adored, whether as "Jehovah, Jove, or Lord." "Abominable idolatry" is the language of Scripture, as just as it is severe. Wealth lavished her stores, that architecture might display her skill, to rear at Ephesus a temple, where the intellectual Greeks worshipped a log. Millions of our fellow-men are, to this day, thus "mad upon their idols." Oh, that our heads were waters, and our eyes fountains of tears!

But barren pity will not pay the debt we owe to our fellow-men, who put the most ruinous sin for saving religion. It was not thus that the first disciples discharged the debt of charity. No. "This Paul persuaded and turned away much people from gods made with hands." Thus the Christian church warred against idols, till Popery took them under her protection, baptized them with Christian names, and, calling Jupiter Peter, placed him in her cathedral, saying, as of old, concerning Baal, "Let them that worship, kiss." Thus the Samson that pulled down the temple of Dagon, has fallen into the hands of the Philistines, and idolatry still remains. Then awake, arise, Christians, and come to the help of the Lord against idols; for when you bear the pure religion of the apostles, you, too, shall "persuade and turn much people."

3. *How far superior should Christians be to popular clamour, the senseless cry of the world.* A favourite watch-word has often been a firebrand, flung about by the hour, to silence reason and crush truth. The force of argument was estimated by the strength of lungs, and it was death to deny that great is the

block which Ephesians call Artemis. But you, aware that the whisper of wisdom is better than the noise of fools, must rise superior to the infatuation or intimidation of a popular cry, more frequently raised for idols, error, and sin, than for God, and holiness, and truth. First, "Christians to the lions!" then, "Heretics, Protestants, to the fire!" Neither seize these arms, nor quail before them. Remember Him that heard, unmoved, "Crucify him!"

The kindness of the Asiarchs, in sending to warn the apostle against venturing into the theatre, and the adroit eloquence of the recorder, we should not have expected; but "when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him," disappointing foes and raising up friends, even in Cæsar's household. This should teach us to look at men with a benevolent eye; for we know not in what part of this fallen world our Lord may find us friends; whose kindness we should requite with our most grateful wishes and intercessory prayers, and whom we may ultimately own and love "as fellow-citizens of the saints and of the household of faith."

In his First Epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle seems to refer to this event, when he says, "If, after the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not?" Some think this difficult text cannot refer to the present subject, because the First Epistle to the Corinthians was not written from Philippi, as the postscript affirms, but from Ephesus, as the eighth verse of the last chapter shows: "I will tarry at Ephesus." But, though it is said, "That, after the uproar, Paul called the disciples and embraced them, to go into Macedonia." It is not necessary to suppose that this was done in a few hours, or even days. The Epistle to the Corinthians may have been written, or, at least, finished, and sent off, after the uproar, and before Paul quitted Ephesus. But in what sense he fought with beasts there, has been disputed. Luther, and some of the ancients, thought he actually was thrown to the lions and miraculously delivered, which is contrary both to the narrative of the Acts, and to the list of the apostle's sufferings, that contains almost every other than this, though the most remarkable, if real. The prevalent opinion has been, that the apostle calls his conflict with the infuriate crowd, a battle with wild

beasts; but Paul was prevented, by his friends, from meeting the crowd. I think, therefore, that the expression *κατὰ ἄνθρωπον*, which we here translate, "after the manner of men;" and, in 1 Cor. ix. 8, "Say I these things, *as a man*," expresses what a man would experience in Paul's circumstances. He would have entered into the theatre, knowing that he was accused of impiety towards the gods, and that, "to the beasts," would be the cry. It was according to man's nature, in such a case, to see, *by anticipation*, the beasts let loose, the fatal fight commence, and to feel the savage creature tearing his flesh and grinding his bones with their teeth; so that it was all suffered by anticipation, if not in fact. For, by faith, the apostle said, "Let it be. I am ready to die for the Lord Jesus; for I shall have a better resurrection." "But what shall it profit me *thus* to have fought with beasts, if the dead rise not? For, then, this body, which should have risen more glorious, for having been offered to Christ in faith, and love, and expectation, shall not rise at all. But, now, I know that he who saw me brave the fury of the battle in intention will crown my body with higher honours."

Let Christians remember, that, if all are not martyrs, in fact; they who, by offering themselves to danger for Christ's sake, fight with beasts in intention, shall find it profit them at the resurrection of the just.

Read the First Epistle to the Corinthians, remembering that it was written from Ephesus, in consequence of some coming to the apostle from Corinth, who informed him of the state of the church there, and especially that some among them said, "There is no resurrection of the dead." Conceive of the fifteenth chapter written with the infuriate cry of the idolaters in his ears, and the anticipation of being one day torn to pieces, through their fury, and, at last, rising in brighter glory and joy, filling his heart. Thus read, the chapter becomes even more animated and interesting than before; and we see new light poured on some of the closing words of the Epistle: "I will tarry at Ephesus till Pentecost, for a great door and effectual is opened to me, and *there are many adversaries*." 1 Cor. xvi. 8, 9.

The twenty-second Lecture brings to a close the triumphant formation of churches of Gentiles, where idolatry had reigned in all its false glory.

LECTURE XXIII.

PAUL AT MILETUS.

ACTS XX.

THE scene which now opens to our view exhibits a “disciple made like his Master.” For, “when the hour was come, that Jesus should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.” Unmoved by the reluctance and affectionate remonstrance of mistaken disciples, he pursued his journey; teaching all the way, at length celebrating the Sacred Supper, dispensing consolations, counsels, and warnings; after which, came imprisonment, trial for his life, and the fatal cross. Now, we see Paul setting his face to go to Jerusalem, interspersing his journey thither with solemn discourses, celebrating the Holy Supper, amidst the tears of an affectionate parting; after which, he advances to be tried for his life; and, sent to Rome, a prisoner in chains, becomes lost to history first, and then, to this world. Consider,

I. THE EVENTS WHICH PRECEDED THE APOSTLE’S ARRIVAL AT MILETUS.

They were of two kinds: itinerant, and ministerial.

1. *The itinerant.* “After the disturbance was quieted, Paul, having called together and embraced the disciples, set off to go into Macedonia,” as he had previously designed. But having

passed through those parts, Philippi, and Thessalonica, and Berea, and having animated them with much discourse, he came into Greece, pursuing the same course as on the first visit, which was so much more fully narrated. While at Philippi, he sent the second letter to Corinth, and wrote to the Romans, the epistle which contains these words, "From Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum, I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ." Lardner and Paley show how the circle of Paul's labours extended westward, to the borders of Illyricum; so that the Acts and the Epistles prove each other.

"After three months, as there was a plot formed by the Jews against him, when they knew he was going to sail into Syria; it was determined to return through Macedonia," thus retracing his steps. To take care of him in these dangers, the following disciples accompanied him as far as Asia: Sopater, a Berean, son of Pyrrhus (Griesbach); of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus, a Macedonian; and Secundus and Gaius, of Derbe; and Timothy. Two Asiatics, Tychicus and Trophimus, in order to receive the apostle on his arrival in their own country, going before, waited for us at Troas. "But *we* ourselves," says Luke, "set sail, after the days of unleavened bread, from Philippi, and came to them to Troas, within five days, where we tarried seven days." The apostle delayed, till the feast, that he might preach to those who came to celebrate it; but these travels and voyages, so compendiously related, we find, from other Scriptures, were full of peril, as well as toil.

2. *The ministerial events.* "On the first of the week, we, being collected to break bread, Paul was discoursing to them, about to set off on the morrow, and extending the discourse till midnight." Luke says, "the first of the Sabbath;" and the Syriac employs "Sabbath," for the week. Paul appears to have landed at the close of one first day; and though in haste, he waited for the return of that which the apostle John calls the "Lord's-day;" proving that among days, it was to Christians, while under the guidance of inspired apostles, what the Lord's Supper was among suppers—that one which was devoted to the Lord, for his worship and honour. In vain, therefore, do some ignorantly, others profanely, and many papistically, affirm, that we have no scriptural authority, nothing but the custom of the church, to sanctify the Lord's-day. We take

our stand on inspired Scripture ; for the practice of the church, when under the apostles, who wrote the Scriptures, is scriptural authority.

The well-supported (Griesbach, Scholz) ἡμῶν, we ; for μαθητῶν, disciples, shows that nothing more is recorded here than might have occurred if the supper had been celebrated, not every Lord's-day, though it was, on that one in which Paul ministered here. Whatever may be said of early practice, and of the desirableness of weekly communion ; the obligation to it cannot be proved from this text. We may, however, observe, that the phrase, "breaking of bread," exhibits what may be called Protestant views of the supper ; for what the priests of Rome call the celebration of the mass, is anything but the breaking of bread. They deny that it is bread, when they break it, to give to the people.

The continuance of Paul's discourse till midnight, arose from his intention to depart on the morrow, and is recorded, to show, both the intense earnestness of the apostle's ministry, and the miracle to which the prolonged service gave rise.

"There were a good many lamps in the upper story, where we were collected ; and there, was sitting a certain young man, named Eutychus, in the window, borne down by deep sleep, Paul discoursing to great length ; oppressed by the sleep, he fell from the third story down, and was taken up dead." The difference between the houses in the east, of which the Scriptures speak, and ours, is increasing daily ; for we have now few of those inns, which used to afford some illustration of such passages as this ; by presenting to the visitor a large gateway, with a room over it ; and on his entrance, exhibiting a square court, on whose sides were galleries, into which the chambers opened. The upper room, or story, of which Luke here speaks, may have been that of the Aliah, as the Syriac reads, which is the apartment over the gateway. We must, however, not think of a glass window, which was then unknown ; but of a latticed opening for the admission of air, running from the top to that court below, into which Eutychus fell ; the lateness of the hour, the heat of the lamps, and the company, contributing to throw him into a profound sleep. When he was taken up and found to be dead ; concern for the youth, for his relatives, and for the world, that would receive an evil

impression from such a circumstance, induced them to look to the apostle, to whom Christ had said, "Raise the dead." Paul, therefore, having descended, fell upon him, and having, like Elijah, embraced him, said, "Be not disturbed, for his soul is in him." In this brief and unostentatious way, one of the greatest of miracles, restoring the dead to life, is recorded.

If I take this opportunity of warning my hearers against going to sleep, under the sound of the Gospel, lest they should sleep the sleep of death; perhaps I shall be reminded, that a miracle was wrought, to recover such a one. But, oh, remember that though we have still those who can sleep, when they should be "hearing, that their souls may live;" we have no preachers who can bring them to life again, if they thus die; and you have no right to plead the example of Eutychus, till we follow the example of Paul, and preach till midnight.

How long the previous discourse and devotion lasted, we learn from the breaking of bread being mentioned *after* the miracle wrought at midnight. The tasting, or eating, seems to mean ordinary refreshment, which was needful *after* many hours of devotion, and *before* "talking again, a long while, even till break of day;" when it is said of Paul: "So he departed;" the time for setting out being, perhaps, fixed for day-break. They who were left at Troas, brought young Eutychus alive from the dead; and were, beyond measure, comforted, to think that, if they were deprived of the apostle's presence, they retained a proof of his apostolic powers, and, instead of the calumny and danger which would have arisen from the death of one in their assembly, at midnight, they had a living witness of the Divine interposition, which sealed the truth of the religion they had embraced. As Paul had been prevented before from preaching at Troas, by a vision of the night, which said, "Come over to Macedonia and help us;" it is pleasant to see him here again, preaching in a church of Christians.

Passing rapidly over the movements that will conduct us to Miletus; we observe that Luke introduces himself and others, saying, "*We*, going before to ship, set sail thence, being about to take up Paul; for so had he determined, as he was going to walk." That Luke did not walk with him, has been taken for a hint that he was older than the apostle; though it may have arisen from the latter wishing to be, for devotional purposes,

alone ; while it proves his incessant exertions, that, after ministering, not only by day, but through the whole night, he walked twenty miles ; for such was the distance across the neck of the promontory from Troas to the port of Assos, where the others, having sailed round, more than fifty miles, took him up. We came thence to Mitylene, one of the five cities of the island of Lesbos, now called Mytelene. Having sailed thence, again ; we came, on the following day, over against the island of Chios, famous for its wine. On the day after, we reached Samos, another well-known isle ; and stopping at Trogyllium, a promontory of the continent, the next day, we came to Miletus on the river Meander, about twenty-five miles south of Ephesus, which Paul had determined to sail by, leaving it on the left hand. His reason was, that he might not wear away the time in Asia ; for he was “ hasting, if it were possible, for him to be, on the day of Pentecost, at Jerusalem,” and you will recollect that he did not leave Philippi, till after the days of unleavened bread ; and Pentecost means fifty, the number of days from Passover to the next feast. That he might not be detained at Ephesus, he sent for the elders, or presbyters of the church there, to come to him at Miletus.

II. THE EVENTS WHICH FOLLOWED THE ARRIVAL AT MILETUS.

These may be divided into the preaching and the parting.

1. *The preaching*, verses 18—38. “ When the elders were come, he said to them,” what we shall not examine minutely, as if the theology of the New Testament were our theme ; but consider, rather, historically, according to the genius of the book which we expound.

“ You know, from the first day of my arrival in Asia (Proper), how I was with you, the whole time, waiting on the Lord, with all lowliness, and tears, and temptations, that befell me in the plots of the Jews.” This appeal to their own knowledge of his temper and conduct, being designed to instruct them in their duty, properly includes that most important temper, humility, so that the apostle cannot be said to be proud of his humility. To hear him tell of his tears and temptations, as arising from the Jews, is enough to draw tears from those to whom “ they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes ; though, touching the Gospel,

they are enemies for our sakes." Nor should we forget, that our missionaries still meet with more injuries from those who are called Christians, than from the heathen. Bear witness, O Tahiti!

The apostle equally appeals to the elders, to witness that he had "kept back nothing that was profitable; but, both publicly, and in each house, announced and taught, testifying, both to Jews and Greeks, that repentance which is towards God, and that faith which is towards our Lord Jesus Christ." Some, who impiously pretend to be successors to the apostles, unblushingly recommend keeping back, or reserve, in preaching; and, if they plead, in apology, that it is not what is profitable; we reply, that it is the very truth which Paul kept not back, the atonement of the cross, which so demands our faith in Christ, that apostles call the Gospel "the preaching of the cross." Preachers are here reminded that the repentance which is a change of the mind, a turning to God, is an essential theme of evangelical preaching; and that the faith in Christ, which we should inculcate, proves him not a mere man, but "the Lord, God manifest in the flesh; for cursed is the man that trusteth in man."

"And now, behold, I, bound in the Spirit, am going to Jerusalem, not knowing the events that will befall me in it, except that the Holy Spirit in each city testifies to me, saying, that bonds and afflictions await me." The particular events in Jerusalem, and their consequences, he knew not; though he was bound by the Spirit's guidance and impulse to go. "But I make account of nothing, nor hold my life dear to me; so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God," glad tidings of salvation by grace. The conduct of the apostle had so far proved this true, that he might well demand credit for all that was to come, and call the pastors to prepare to do likewise. No man, indeed, can be Christ's disciple, who is not ready to lay down life for his sake. Finish our course in this world we must; but this is the way to do it with joy.

"And now, behold, I know that no more will ye see my face; ye all, among whom I have gone, preaching the kingdom of God. Wherefore, I testify to you, this day, that I am pure

from the blood of all ; for I have not failed to announce to you all the counsel of God." Again, reserve in the communication of religious truth is smitten with the apostolic rod ; and he that is guilty of keeping back any part of the counsel of God, is proved not pure from the blood of all men.

"Therefore, attend to yourselves, and to all the flock in which the Holy Ghost hath placed you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord, which he has purchased by his own blood." Here you will perceive two departures from our authorised version, of such magnitude as to deserve discussion. The persons who, in verse 17, are called elders, are now termed bishops ; and the same interchange of appellations is found in other texts. This apostle reminds Titus, "I left thee in Crete, that thou shouldest ordain elders, if any be blameless ; for a bishop must be blameless." Peter says, "The elders among you I exhort, who also am an elder ; feed the flock of God, *ἐπισκοποῦντες*, bishoping, or discharging the duties of bishops, not as lords over God's clergy," (the only text where *κλήρος*, "clergy," occurs, though here signifying the people, not the ministers,) "but as examples to the flock ; and when the chief Shepherd," *ἀρχιποίμην*, "arch-shepherd," or archbishop, "Christ, the only Shepherd of shepherds, shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

So clear is it that the Scriptures call the same officers indifferently, elders, or bishops, that the advocates of an opposite system, called episcopalian, concede the point, and plead only, that the age immediately following appropriated the title of bishop to some one who presided over the others, that were called simply presbyters, or elders. We deny that even this, which gives up Scripture, is true of the age next to the apostles. The mention of more than one presbyter-bishop at Ephesus, may have arisen from the prospect of persecution, which might fall first on the pastors ; though the language of Scripture leads us to conclude that the ordinary rule was, one shepherd to one flock ; or, one bishop to one church or congregation. The pastors must take heed, first, to themselves ; for then they will best feed the flock.

Translating *ἐπισκόπους*, not "bishops," which is the proper word, but "overseers," is mere partizanship, dealing deceitfully with the word of God. If it be said, the translators were not left at

liberty; for the conceited, wicked, king, James, as head of their church, commanded them to retain certain ecclesiastical terms; you might reply, that here they have not retained, but strangely avoided, the term of office—"bishop." For what reason, but that the same persons had been previously called elders? In like manner, where Peter had spoken of elders, our version renders ἐπισκοποῦντες, not "exercising the office of a bishop," but "taking the oversight;" though where elders had not been mentioned, they never translate the word for "bishop" by the English term "overseer." But, by this artifice in the text before us, what have they done? They have banished bishops from the inspired history of the Christian church; so that a man might say, "Let the history of my church be like that of the church of Christ written by Luke, in which the very word 'bishop' never occurs."

In this text, honestly translated, the bishops that appear are the presbyters, or elders, who are pastors of the flock, and not some superiors over presbyters, acting as shepherds of shepherds, instead of feeding the sheep. Usher, and the more moderate Episcopalians, make the bishop a senior presbyter in the chair, *primus inter pares*; but this and other texts make presbyter and bishop interchangeable terms for the same office.

The next departure from our translation is, the substitution of the word *Lord*, for "*God* hath purchased the church with his own blood." "The blood of God," or "God's own blood," would strike us as strange, and not according to Scripture, where we read of the blood of Christ, but not of God. But, since our translation was made, larger opportunities have been afforded, and embraced, of collating the various manuscripts, the result of which Griesbach, Scholz, and others, have given in critical editions of the Greek Testament. The word "God" is unsupported by the best manuscripts, or by any valid evidence; and I have adopted what I deem the genuine reading, "the church of the Lord, which he purchased with his own blood." This is a question of fact, whether Luke recorded the word "God," or "Lord," and must be decided by its own proper evidence, irrespective of its bearing on doctrine; for we are to derive our doctrine from the text, not the text from the doctrine. The divinity of Christ cannot be proved to those who deny it, from the word "God," in this text, while there is so much evidence

against its authenticity,—the oldest version, the Syriac Peshito, having the word “Messiah,” or Christ, instead of God.

But, if the church is the Lord’s, who purchased it with his own blood, then he is God; for the church is the property, not of a mere man, but of God, as “the church of God” is a confessedly scriptural phrase; and God is said to have “purchased his people, Israel.” But, from a necessary piece of criticism, I turn to reflect on the mighty motive to watchfulness over ourselves, and faithful care of the church, which arises from the thrilling consideration that Christ purchased it to himself, by his own blood. Woe to the man that injures it! “Deliver us from bloodguiltiness, O God of our salvation, and our tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.”

The same Spirit that led Paul to Jerusalem, to meet persecution, enabled him to warn the bishops thus: “For I know this, that there shall enter, after my departure, grievous wolves among you, not sparing the flock. Even of your own selves there shall arise men speaking perverse things, to draw off the disciples after them.” How false and foolish is it, then, to set up the Christians of the post-apostolic age, as oracles, which they do, who, acknowledging that the Scriptures make presbyters and bishops identical, plead for a difference which arose after the apostles were dead. Alas! “the mystery of iniquity did already work” in their days, and nothing but what Scripture sanctions can have divine authority. If, by “your own selves,” the apostle means the pastors or bishops, history proves that they often spoke perverse things, to draw away the disciples to themselves rather than their Lord. Hymenæus and Philetus may have fulfilled this prediction, and the Nicolaitans are mentioned in the Apocalyptic Epistle to Ephesus.

“Therefore, watch, remembering that, for three years, I have not ceased, with tears, admonishing every one.” The three years are mentioned as current, not finished; for Paul was two whole years in the school of Tyrannus, after having been at Ephesus three months in the synagogue; but the third year may include the time that had elapsed till this discourse was delivered. His incessant labours, night and day, and his tearful admonitions, afforded a solemn monition to watchfulness.

“And now I commit you, brethren, to God, and to the word of his grace,” which was so dear to the apostle, that life itself

was valued, only for the sake of testifying the glad tidings of the grace of God, or his free favour, through Christ. This word "is able to build you up, and give you an inheritance with all the sanctified." To God and his word the apostle commits the church, while some moderns commit the church to the church, omitting the Scriptures, which they study to exclude. But God, who "has magnified his word above all his name," has committed his church to it, as his instrument for building it up to perfection. "Sanctify them by thy truth," said our Lord; "thy word is truth;" and thus we obtain the inheritance of the sanctified, or saints, in light; for, "without holiness, no man shall see the Lord."

"Of the silver, or gold, or raiment, of no one have I been desirous;" for I seek not yours, but you, says the apostle. "Ye yourselves know, that to my necessities, and to those that were with me, these hands have ministered." It seems, then, that, not at Corinth only, where he worked with Aquila, the tent-maker, but at Ephesus too, where he rejoined them, he laboured for his bread. Yet, why also "for those that were with him"? Should not they have worked for themselves? I suppose this refers to Timothy, who was advised to drink no longer water, but to "take a little wine for his stomach's sake, and his often infirmities;" and there may have been others, who were serviceable to the apostle for the ministry, but were unequal to manual labour. To such as these he appears to allude, when he says, "I have showed you all things, that so labouring, ye ought to help the *weak*," which equally signifies the sick, as we, when calling a person weakly, mean, not merely wanting in muscular force, but in good health. It may, however, naturally be asked, how this accords with the enjoined duty of them that are taught to "communicate to Him that teacheth in all good things;" so that "the Lord has commanded that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel; which the apostle urges to such an extent as to say, that he *robbed* other churches, by taking wages of them," while he was serving the Corinthians. The solution of the difficulty lies in the difference between a missionary and a pastor, or bishop, of a Christian church. On a mission to the heathen, we ought not to expect, or require, them to support us, while they have not received our religion as divine; but when they have, we should teach them (though they cannot be

expected to learn instantaneously) to discharge Christian duties, among which stands conspicuous that of supporting their pastors and teachers. But, again, I say, all honour to those who work with their own hands, that they may preach to heathen and support their fellow-labourers when sick; though all shame to those who call themselves Christians, and will not labour to support those who live and labour for their salvation. The missionaries and the pastors were, in the apostles' days, but imperfectly distinguished.

Here we meet with what some would call a well-accredited tradition; but what I call, not tradition, but Scripture. In none of the Gospels we meet with these words of the Lord Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." That he said it, we know, however, not from tradition, but because the Holy Spirit has inserted it in this book. Oh, remember the words! They are like your Lord, and are calculated to make you like him. If the beautiful saying was, when floating down to the gulf of oblivion, rescued and recorded, for the benefit of the church, deposit it in your bosom, as too good to be forgotten or lost.

"Having said these things, kneeling down, he prayed with them all;" as our Lord closed his discourse, by the prayer recorded in the seventeenth of John; for we need to ask that blessing, without which the word is "as water spilled on the ground, that cannot be gathered up."

"There was considerable lamentation of all; falling on Paul's neck, they kissed him, grieved chiefly for the word which he spake, that no more would they see his face; and they accompanied him to the ship."

That the former verse has been rendered by some, "you will not *all* see my face again," has arisen from the opinion that Paul came into these parts again, after his imprisonment; but the manner in which the words are here repeated, seems to prove that he knew he would not be seen again in this country, at least by these persons.

Who can wonder at their sorrow, on parting with one who could make the appeal which we have just heard? It is full of the evidence of truth and grace. Yet this was the man whom bonds and persecutions awaited wherever he went. What must we think of the world which thus treated its best

inhabitants, its most benevolent benefactors? O earth! thou hast lauded and worshipped thy conquerors,—the Alexanders, Cæsars, and Napoleons, that have laid thee waste, and slain thy thousands; but, for thy preachers of righteousness, with Jesus at their head, thou hast had nothing but a gaol, or a cross! Yet this is the world that thou, child of vanity and unbelief, lovest! Look at it, and say, “For what?” Canst thou be surprised that God should say, “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Happy they who can declare, “By the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, the world is crucified to me, and I am crucified to the world.”

This twenty-third Lecture contains Paul’s farewell sermon, which sends us back to view the course he has pursued. Such were his labours and dangers, that we may call him an adamantine man, that can neither bend, nor break, nor wear out. But when we see him parting with the church, we are melted by the tone of affection and fidelity with which he warns the pastors, and we join with those who all wept sore, sorrowing most of all *for his words*, “Ye shall see my face no more.” With the entire absence of all rhetorical art, his discourse contains all the elements of moral beauty, wisdom, benevolence, pathos, and sublimity. Marching steadily to bonds, imprisonment, and death, unmoved, he is absorbed in the interests of others; and, having made his whole career a living sacrifice to the church, he is anxious that others may share that glory with himself. Unless the perfection of virtue could be introduced by imposture, and men could be supposed to cheat us into all that is holy and excellent, the moral character of the scene we have now witnessed must leave on our consciences an indelible conviction that the religion propagated by Paul came from God.

LECTURE XXIV.

PAUL'S FINAL ARRIVAL AT JERUSALEM.

ACTS xxi. 1—33.

MAY I not say that we are now to visit, for the last time, the Holy City, never more to be guided by the Divine Word to that once favoured place? For after it has cast out the apostle Paul, even its very destruction, though predicted by the lips of Jesus, is left to be recorded by a profane pen. Following in the apostle's footsteps, we hear the doleful oracle, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." Matt. xxiii. 37, 38. "Behold, I send you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city; that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily, I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation." Ver. 34—36.

The progress to Jerusalem we shall watch, and then witness the apostle's reception.

I. THE PROGRESS TO JERUSALEM. Ver. 1—16.

This was divided between the voyage to Tyre and the journey to the metropolis.

1. *The voyage to Tyre.* Ver. 1—7. "But when we set sail, being torn from them, having run a straight course, we came to Co," an island, celebrated for *Coæ vestes*, transparent vestments, termed by Pliny "woven light," answering, perhaps, to our muslin, or gauze. The next day, they reached another island, called Rhodes, from *ῥόδον*, the rose, which abounded there; but more famous for its Colossus, a gigantic toy. But, leaving these isles on their right, they came to Patara, a port in Lycia, where the heathen said, "Apollo, quitting Delphi, resided the six winter months." "Here, finding a ship crossing over to Phenicia, having embarked, *we*," says the historian, "set sail. But having brought Cyprus into view, and left it on the larboard, we sailed to Syria, and were brought down to Tyre; for there the ship was discharging the cargo."

In this ancient commercial port, now called Sur, "finding disciples, we tarried there seven days." For though the apostle had hastened towards Jerusalem, the distant voyage, which created uncertainty, was now finished, and he knew he could be there by the feast of Pentecost, if he staid a week, to afford opportunity for meeting the church on the Lord's-day. But more than delay was threatened; for "the disciples told Paul, through the Spirit, not to go up to Jerusalem." This gives occasion to ask, "As the Spirit of Truth cannot give contradictory oracles, How could he tell Paul, who 'went bound in the Spirit, to Jerusalem,' not to go there?" It must be observed, that while many of the early disciples enjoyed special influences of the Spirit, the apostles were honoured with an inspiration beyond all other men. These Tyrian disciples knew by the Spirit, what would befall the apostle at Jerusalem; which led *them* to say to him, "Go not thither." The advice, however, was a mistaken inference from true premises, and the apostle, who knew the impulse under which he acted, treated it accordingly.

"When we had finished those (seven) days, having gone forth, we proceeded; they all conducting us forth, with wives and children, as far as the outside of the city, which lying on the coast, we kneeled down on the shore and prayed." A beautiful specimen of devotion, foreign from the manners of

the English, whom the French ridicule for their *mauvaise honte*, and who have more of the false and foolish shame of being seen to be religious, than, perhaps, any people on the face of the earth. But the Jews regarded the sea-shore as the purest place for prayer. "And having embraced each other, we embarked in the ship, and they returned home. And we, having finished the voyage from Tyre, arrived at Ptolemais; and having embraced the brethren, we remained one day with them." This place, in the Book of Joshua called Accho, which the Syriac retains, received the name that here occurs, from one of the Egyptian Ptolemies; but was, by the Crusaders, named St. Jean d'Acre, and has become familiar to us, as Acre, where Sir Sidney Smith arrested the progress of Buonaparte, in his Egyptian expedition. Famous as it had been for sustaining his siege of sixty-one days, and others still longer, it was lately blown up by the British in a few hours. We have now finished the history of the voyage towards Jerusalem, and must proceed to,

2. *The journey to the metropolis.* For, "after resting one day; on the morrow, having gone out, we came to Cesarea," a city which we before noticed; "and, having entered into the house of Philip, the evangelist, being one of the seven, we remained with him." You will remember, that, in the list of the seven first deacons, next to the name of Stephen, the proto-martyr, stands that of Philip, who returned from his mission to the Ethiopian, to settle at Cesarea, and is now called the evangelist; the first time that we meet with any mention of that office. The modern practice of making deacons ministers of the word, derives hence no sanction. Philip ceased to be a deacon of the church of Jerusalem; and residing at Cesarea as an evangelist, he assisted the apostles in their labours. Timothy and Titus, called evangelists, show that these officers went where the apostles wished to *send* the glad tidings; and so far, corresponded to what we should call itinerants, or missionaries; but Timothy and Titus attended on Paul. Philip was an example of that good degree, *βαθμὸς*, or step of advancement, which they who use the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves; and his residence at Cesarea was probably designed for the propagation of the faith.

This person "had four virgin daughters, prophesying;" in

fulfilment of the prediction to which Peter appealed at Pentecost : "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your *daughters* shall prophesy."

"But, as we were remaining many days, there descended from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus, who had before predicted the general dearth. Having come to us, and taken the girdle, or sash, of Paul, and bound his own hands and feet, he said, Thus speaks the Holy Spirit : the man whose girdle this is, shall the Jews in Jerusalem thus bind, and deliver into the hands of the Gentiles." The ancient prophets often rendered their prophecies more exciting, by such symbolic acts, as Isaiah's walking stripped and barefoot ; Jeremiah's breaking the bottles in the court of the temple ; and Ezekiel's removing his furniture. Thus, an African prince sent to his rival a pair of iron sandals and a bundle of arrows, with this message, "When you have worn out these sandals in your flight, you may hope to escape my arrows." Observe, however, that the prophet Agabus says nothing about Paul's duty, but simply predicts the event, which we know to have happened.

"But, as we heard these things, both we, and those of that place, exhorted him not go up to Jerusalem." Luke, who speaks of himself and the other companions of Paul, joined the Christians of Cesarea in this exhortation ; because they, knowing only the future event, were left to act according to their prudence and their affection for Paul. But it was otherwise with him, who knew that he was bound by the Spirit to go, whatever might befall him. Paul, therefore, answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart ? For I, not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem, am ready, for the name of the Lord Jesus." "But he not being persuaded, we became quiet, saying, The will of the Lord be done."

It pleased God to impart the knowledge of his designs to the different parties here assembled, in ways and degrees so various that a lovely conflict arose. They wept and entreated him not to go ; he felt their kindness so keenly that it threatened to do what afflictions could not, break his heart. But higher considerations compelled him to reprove their love ; for he knew that the God who had informed *them* only of the event, had bound *him*, by a sense of duty, to brave the consequence. He was ready to be bound, and to die, too, at Jerusalem, for the

name of the Lord Jesus; which death he seems to have expected, hoping, too, that it would not only turn to the honour of Christ, but to the conversion of his countrymen, in that very city where he had made havoc of the church for owning the name of Jesus. Paul's constancy opened the eyes of his friends to the true state of the case, that, though the Lord had revealed to *them* the future bonds of the apostle, it was the will of the Lord that this should be done; and when once this is known, every Christian must adopt the language of the Psalmist: "I was dumb; I opened not my mouth; for thou didst it."

"But after these days, having packed up," not taken up carriages, "we ascended to Jerusalem, two days before the feast of Pentecost. And there came also some of the disciples from Cesarea with us, leading us to one, or conducting one, with whom we might be entertained as guests, Mnason, a certain Cypriot, an ancient disciple." The Cesarean Christians went, not only on account of the feast, but also to rally round him that was going to prison for Christ's sake; and they who would not do this, are not his disciples. That they conducted with them the Cypriot, Mnason, who, perhaps, received the Gospel on Paul's first visit to Cyprus, and who, now having a house at Jerusalem, would be their host, was more necessary than might be supposed. For, though Jerusalem was the common property of the Jews, at the great festivals, and every citizen was bound to make his house an inn; such was the confluence at the Pentecost, which was now approaching, that it was difficult to find accommodations, especially for Christians, who were shut out from all but the houses of Christians, neither the most numerous, nor the most wealthy class. But that Lord, who can open all hearts and all houses to his faithful servants, provided for Paul and Luke that most welcome comfort, an old friend, the fruit of the apostles' former labours. Mnason was richly rewarded for his hospitality in the society of such men, and in the pleasure of thinking that mine was the last house in Jerusalem which entertained the apostle, ere he was delivered up to the Gentiles, and sent away to Rome, to be tried for his life at the tribunal of Cæsar.

II. THE ARRIVAL AT JERUSALEM. Ver. 17—33.

Here we are to watch the apostle's movements, till he was

taken into the custody of the Romans ; and this period exhibits his intercourse with Christian friends, and his conflict with Jewish foes.

1. *Intercourse with Christian friends.* Ver. 17—27. “But we, being come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.” Paul, indeed, knew, as he ascended the hill and entered the gate, that he was to meet bonds, and knew not but he was going to die, where his Lord was crucified ; but the Christian brethren were absorbed in the pleasure of meeting, once more, with the apostle of the Gentiles, who showed that his love for the poor saints at Jerusalem was unabated ; for he came to bring them alms.

“But, on the following day, Paul entered in with us to James, and all the elders were present.” You will, again, observe that this James was the son, not of Zebedee, but of Alphæus, and the brother, not of John, but of Jude. He remained, perhaps on account of age, at Jerusalem, as a pillar ; when the other apostles went through the world. He has been called, by a left-handed compliment, bishop of Jerusalem ; though, being an apostle, his diocese was the world.

“Paul having embraced James, and he elders, related one by one, not what he had done, but everything that God had done among the Gentiles” by his ministry. The “good news from a far country is to us as cold water to a thirsty stomach ;” but how much more must it have been to them who had no such means of intelligence as we enjoy, and who saw the fruits of the apostle’s success among the Gentiles, in the contributions brought by his hands. “And they having heard,” envied not, but “glorified the Lord,” the name constantly given to Christ, whom they adored as the God that wrought these things by the apostle.

But now we turn to the critical question, which led to all the subsequent troubles. “And they said to him, Thou seest, brother, what myriads there are of the Jews who have believed ; and they are all zealots of the law ;” or, as we should say, *for* the law. Their language, “thou seest,” leads us to think that they refer to those that were then assembled ; and the expression, “*what* or *how many* myriads,” *i. e.*, tens of thousands, fills us with equal wonder and delight, reminding us, both of the grain of mustard seed, or the grain fallen into the ground, bearing much fruit, and also that “God had not cast off his people whom he foreknew ; for, at this time, there is a “remnant according to the

election of grace." Oh, when shall we say, again, "Thou seest how many myriads of the Jews there are that have believed"? That the first Jewish believers were zealots for the law of Moses, is not so unaccountable as some may imagine. The Christian religion is so far from being opposed to the authority of the Old Testament, that "*we* have the ancient word of prophecy made more sure," "and are built upon the foundation of the prophets as well as apostles." Now, it is certain that, by God himself, the law of Moses was given to the Jews, and their faith in Christ would increase their reverence for the Divine authority of the law, as well as the prophets. But God, who imparts the knowledge of his will as he pleases, had not yet so clearly announced the abolition, as the institution, of the law of ceremonies. It seems to have been his design to abolish it, by an event which should render its observance impossible. Paul, therefore, wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, to prepare them for the right use of that event, the destruction of Jerusalem and the banishment of the Jews from Canaan, the only land in which the Mosaic law was practicable. That Epistle, which was written after the time of which we are now speaking, says "the law was waxing old, and ready to vanish away." If the manner in which Paul speaks to the Galatians, has led any to conclude that the observance of the law was, in all cases, an abjuration of the Gospel, they are mistaken. For the Galatians were Gentiles, to whom the law never was given, and for *them* to take to it was virtually to say, that faith in Christ alone cannot justify us, but we must add to this, the observance of the law. To such, the apostle says, "Christ shall profit you nothing. You are fallen from (salvation by) grace." But the case of the Jews was totally different. God had given them the law by Moses. They had been brought up in all the attachments and aversions which it inspired; and their continued observance of it was not opposed to their salvation, provided they placed no confidence in it, but looked for justification by faith, in Christ alone. Such were the myriads of whom James speaks. That many carried things further, and would have compelled the Gentiles to come under the yoke of the law, is true, as is seen by those whom Paul calls "false brethren, that troubled the Galatians, and whom he wishes to see cut off from the church."

But Paul's fidelity, in defending the freedom of the Gentile converts from all obligation to come under the yoke of the law,

not only created misunderstanding and prejudice against him, among the unbelieving Jews, but even in the Jewish Christian church. For, of these latter persons, James says, "They have been told that thou teachest apostasy from Moses, to all the *Jews* among the nations, saying, They were not to circumcise their children, nor to walk in the customs." More excuse may be made for this mistake, again, than we might suppose. We have shown that the adherence of Jews to their law was tolerated, not commanded; while the imposing of that hard yoke on the Gentiles was forbidden, and the admission of Gentiles into the church, to form one body from the union of these two elements, was enjoined. The apostles, therefore, superior to the prejudices of the Jewish zealots, often shocked them, by living as did the Gentiles; and when Titus, who was a Greek, would have been compelled to be circumcised, Paul would not give way to the "false brethren who privily came in to spy out their liberty." All this was falsely interpreted, as teaching the *Jews* apostasy from the Mosaic customs, and forbidding them to be circumcised.

"What is it, then? A multitude," not *the* multitude; perhaps, many Christians with good, and many Jews with evil, intentions, "must needs come together, for they will hear that thou hast come. This, then, do, which we say to thee. We have four men, having a vow upon themselves. Them having taken, be purified with them, and share expenses with them, that they may shave the head; and all, whether friends or foes, will know that what they have heard of thee is nothing; but thou goest orderly, even thyself keeping the law."

Here we are in danger of falling into a mistake, supposing that Paul was advised to act deceitfully, though James appeals to conduct in which Paul had been a public participator. "But to the Gentiles, who have believed, we gave command, deciding that they should keep no such thing, except to guard themselves from idol sacrifices, and blood, and what is strangled, and from fornication." (See Lecture XVIII.)

The ill report which the believing Jews had received concerning Paul, was brought to Jerusalem, chiefly by the foreign unbelieving Jews; and of these, chiefly, James says, "The multitude must assemble, for they will *hear* that thou art come." The Christian brethren had already seen and embraced him; but the unbelieving crowd, who had formerly prejudiced the

brethren, would seek to perfect their work, on *hearing* of the apostle's arrival.

“Paul, having taken the men, on the following day, being purified with them, entered the temple, announcing the completion of the days of purification, till there should be brought, for every one of them, the offering.” To the Jews, “Paul became as a Jew,” of which he had given notice, in a public letter to the Christian church. His contributing to the expenses of these men, on the completion of the Nazarites' vow, is no proof that he had himself come under that vow ; for this was sometimes done, as Josephus shows, merely to express respectful regards towards the Nazarites and the law. This was the reason for the advice of James, and the compliance of Paul. (See Josephus, *Antiq.*, lib. xix., c. 6.)

2. *The apostle's conflict with the hostile Jews.* “For, as the seven days were about to be completed, the Jews from Asia, having seen him in the temple, stirred up all the mob, and laid hands on him, crying, Men of Israel, help ; this is the man who, against the people, and the law, and this place, is teaching everybody everywhere ; and, besides, even Greeks has brought into the temple, and profaned this holy place. For they had before seen Trophimus, the Ephesian, in the city with him, whom they thought that Paul had brought into the temple.” The last remark was the more candid, inasmuch as the city was under the government of the Romans, who were Gentiles, and with whom the priests of the highest order had frequent intercourse, though they could not be suspected of intending to profane the temple. The attempt to execute mob-law upon the apostle, was, alas ! in perfect keeping with the temper of the Jews, at this time. Far, however, was he from teaching men against the people, the law, and the temple ; though they thus interpreted his doctrine of salvation through Christ alone. But such mistakes are common among zealots for the law.

“And the whole city was agitated,” and there was a concourse of the people at Pentecost, when Jews from all countries were there, to celebrate the giving of the law ; so that the Jews from Asia would be joined by others from places where they formerly had attacked the apostle, whom now, they thought, they had on their own ground, where they could execute the vengeance which they deemed a duty, but from which he had frequently escaped.

“And having laid hold of Paul, they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were closed.” It should be known, and recollected, that into the temple, strictly so called, that is, the sanctuary, or holy place, none but the priests entered, as into the most holy place none but the high priest, once a year, with the blood of atonement. But the court of the people, or Israelites, was that into which Paul and his four companions, as Jews, had a right to enter, and is here called the temple. By dragging him out, they treated him as a heathen; for there was a court of the Gentiles on the outside. The closing of the doors, or gates of the court, must have been the act of the authorities, who presided in the temple, and who, seeing the tumult, were afraid that Gentiles might rush in, and profane a place where none but Jews were admissible.

“But, they seeking to kill him, there went up an information to the colonel of the guard, that all Jerusalem was poured forth.” The attempt upon the life of the apostle, without trial, or authority, was unhappily what the Jews would have defended, as not only lawful, but laudable. This they called the judgment of zeal, after the example of Phineas; though he was an officer acting under the orders of Moses, who was commissioned by God. Now, perhaps, the apostle was reminded of his own words, “I am ready, not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus;” while we remember, also, that he said, “I go, not knowing the things that shall befall me there.” For the information conveyed to the Romans changed the scene. The title of Chiliarch, expresses the commanding officer of a thousand soldiers, who were quartered in the fort of Antonia, which Herod, having built, to overlook the temple, called after the name of Marc Antony. At the great feasts, the Roman commanders were especially on the alert, to guard against the tumults which frequently arose, amidst the concourse of Jews from all parts of the world.

The chiliarch, or colonel, called by our translators, chief-captain, was the tribune, Claudius Lysias, who, “immediately, having taken soldiers, and centurions, or captains, rushed down upon them; and they, having seen the commander and the soldiers, ceased beating Paul.” This was a final escape; for they never again had it in their power to attempt his life, or injure his person. Alas! they deserve no credit for not having

shed his blood ; while our Lord demands our homage and our praise, for saving his servant in the trying hour, and rewarding the triumphant benevolence of the apostle, who never ceased to weep, and pray, and labour for those who sought his life, but to the end could say, "Not that I have aught to accuse my nation of," before Cæsar ; when he might have accused them of seeking to kill him, at the threshold of the temple of God.

Now, come, Christians, tune your harps, first, to melancholy strains over the fall of the Jews ; but, then, to joyful notes in praise of your Lord, who grants his suffering saints deliverance in the trying hour ; and triumphs over all the malice of his foes.

Funeral elegies become the church of God, at this stage of her history, where we have the last historic information concerning the Jewish nation ; though prophecy tells of judgments to come. The prosecution of Paul before the Romans, who had prevented the zealots from killing him, is the melancholy close of the Acts of the Apostles, leaving upon our minds the impression of a fallen people, who, to this day, have never risen from the dust of death. From the time that the apostle passes into the hands of the Romans, we are struck with the contrast between the calm dignity, the judicial impartiality, and the efficient protection displayed by their government, and the malice, the falsehood, and the violence of the Jews. "Verily, O Jews, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written." For, as the corruption of the best things produces the worst, and it will "be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for those cities" which heard Christ and repented not ; so the heathen Romans will have a milder doom than the persecuting Jews. The instrument of their malice becomes a Christian ; but they refuse to reconsider the claims of Christ on their faith ; and when they turn their spite and fury on Saul of Tarsus, now become an apostle of Jesus, no patience and forbearance, no generous returns of good for evil, of blessing for cursing, melts their hard hearts ; but when he comes to bring alms and offerings to his nation, they attempt to kill him, as an enemy to Moses and to the Israel of God. As the last interview which Jesus had with this people was from the cross of Calvary ; so, the last which Paul had with them was when they sought to beat him to death in the temple, or to procure his condemnation

at the tribunal of the Romans. O Jerusalem, O Israel, how hast thou fallen ! When shalt thou rise again ?

But we sing the triumphs of Christ. What a narrative of victories won by Christianity in its infancy, over idolatry in all its might and glory, was given by Paul, at Jerusalem ! And what a response he received from the Christians there ! " See, how many myriads there are of the Jews who have believed." Thus the cross commenced the triumphs which are expelling the idols of the heathen from the face of the earth, and have reduced the Jews to the condition of a people, fallen, broken, and scattered ; making the foundation God laid in Zion, " a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence." For " our Redeemer is mighty, and no weapon formed against his servants shall prosper ;" but in the hour when the Jews thought they had at last found, in Jerusalem, that opportunity to wreak their revenge on Paul, which they had sought in vain among the Gentiles, the Romans are made a shield and tower of defence for the apostle of the Gentiles. And now, if Jerusalem is deaf, Rome shall hear ; and he that was willing to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus, shall live to prove his own words true, " In as much as in me lies, I am willing to preach the Gospel to you that are in Rome also ; for I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."

But surely Paul might say with David, " I will sing of mercy and of judgment ; to thee, O Lord, will I sing !" Think you not, that, when he was dragged out of the temple, he thought of the hour when he " dragged men and women out of the houses" of Jerusalem ; that, when he was cruelly beaten, he remembered how he " beat in every synagogue" them that believed ; that, when they would have killed him, he recalled his share in the death of Stephen ? Yes, these recollections wounded his spirit, more than all the Jewish violence, his body. God had forgiven him, but he could not forgive himself ; nor cease to say, " I am not worthy to be called an apostle, for I persecuted the church ;" and where my sin was committed, there, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem, I bow to the just retribution ! Ah, my friends, while you are deferring the care of your souls, declining the invitations of the Saviour, and persisting in the love of the world and sin, you are incurring, not only the well-known risk of dying in your sins, but another danger, too little thought of, that even, if the best thing that

can be hoped for should occur, your subsequent conversion and forgiveness; you may be now sprinkling gall and wormwood over your future days, committing sins that will haunt you like a ghost, and make you say to him that would comfort you, by the mention of their forgiveness, "Yes, I know God has forgiven me, but that makes it the harder, the more impossible, to forgive myself, for having committed such sins against such a God." My children, it will not only "save you from a thousand snares," but from a thousand pangs, "to mind religion young."

But our Lord tempered his righteous administration with grace. For when Paul was snatched from the rage of the Jews, and taken into the custody of the Romans, he commenced a period of quiet and repose, such as he had never known, from the time when he began to rage against the church, on the one hand; or, on the other, to devote himself to the service of Christ. The years of his prime, when he was strong for physical labour, were now passing away; and his Lord provided for him a relief, which his zeal would not have suffered him to seek. The imprisonment was a real protection from danger, and was made so light, that it was the most useful season of correspondence with the churches which the apostle had planted in the world. Thus, when "clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of God's throne."

We have now finished the twenty-fourth stage of our historic course, and are approaching the end, which is a prison for an apostle, whom we already find under arrest; for the Acts might almost as well be entitled, the Persecutions of the Apostles.

LECTURE XXV.

PAUL'S DEFENCE BEFORE THE MULTITUDE OF THE JEWS.

ACTS xxi. 33, to xxii. to the end of the chapter.

SEVERAL times have we considered at once so large a portion of the sacred history, that we could not scrutinise particulars; and we are again, apparently, in the same predicament; but not so in reality; for almost one half of what comes before us, this morning, is a history of Paul's conversion, into which we entered so fully when expounding the ninth chapter, that I avowed my intention of afterwards considering this event fully known. Now, however, that Paul is passing from the Jews into the hands of the Romans, his special mission, as an apostle to us Gentiles, is rendered more prominent, by a vision of our Lord, which, though granted long before the date of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, we now learn, for the first time, and is, to us, so important and instructive, that we must give it a careful examination.

The introductory circumstances; the narrative of the apostle's conversion; the information new to us, and to the Jews so provoking; and the interposition of the Roman commander, all claim our notice.

I. THE INTRODUCTORY CIRCUMSTANCES. Chap. xxi., ver. 33.

We left the apostle just where Claudius Lysias, having made his appearance with the troops, compelled the Jews to cease from their attempt to beat Paul to death.

"Then the chiliarch, or tribune, having come near, took hold of him," which compelled all others to quit their hold. As Lysias commanded him to be bound with two chains, Paul was, probably, fastened like Peter, each arm being chained to a soldier. Then the commander "inquired who he might be? and what it is that he has done?" This being addressed to the bystanders, who had created the tumult by their treatment of the apostle, they attempted to justify themselves by answering; but, as usual, in such cases, "some cried one thing and some another, in the crowd; so that Lysias, not being able to know the certainty, on account of the tumult, ordered him to be brought into the camp," or, according to more modern phrase, the barracks, in the castle, or fort of Antonia, where the troops were quartered.

But, when he was upon the steps, it happened that he was carried by the soldiers, that is, as I suppose, the two to whom he was chained; for these two found that they were entangled by him, and for their own convenience, as well as his safety, took him up and carried him between them. Roman roads were proved, by the event, to have been made for travelling apostles; of whom we here see one snatched, by Roman soldiers, from the jaws of death. "For the multitude of the people was following, crying, "Away with him to death." Jews clamour for an apostle's death, and idolatrous Romans struggle for his protection.

But Paul, being about to be brought into the camp, says to the commander, "Is it permitted to me to speak a word to thee?" For, before he was withdrawn from all intercourse with the people, by being shut up in the fort Antonia, he wished to make what might be a last effort to inform the minds, and turn the hearts, of his countrymen. But the commander replied, "Do you know Greek?" which seems to intimate that Paul spoke to him in Greek; this being, not only his own native tongue, but that of Lysias also, as the apostle probably perceived by his name, which is Greek, and by his speech too. But the reason why Lysias was surprised to find the apostle speaking Greek is contained in the question, "Art thou not, then, the Egyptian who, before these days, has been making a riot, and leading out into the desert the four thousand men who were murderers?" Of this Egyptian Jew history has said much, and many reasons are given for questioning the accuracy of what Josephus says; if,

indeed, he refers to the person of whom Luke speaks. But Paul said, "I am, indeed, a Jew of Tarsus, a citizen of no obscure city;" for it is always mentioned, by the ancients, as celebrated, so that Paul could easily be known as one of its citizens. "I entreat thee, permit me to speak to the people;" and he having permitted, Paul, standing on the flight of steps, which led from the fort to the court of the temple, waved his hand to the people; and there being great silence, he called out, in the Hebrew dialect, saying, what we are now to consider as

II. THE NARRATIVE OF HIS CONVERSION. Ver. 1—16.

"Brethren and fathers, hear my present apology to you." As we are supposed to make an apology for a fault, by urging some extenuating circumstances, uneducated Christians were offended at the title of an "Apology for the Bible," as if it implied some fault in the book, which needed to be forgiven. But Watson used the word, like the apostle, in the Greek sense, as a reason, not for forgiveness, but for acceptance. But when it is said, he spoke in the Hebrew dialect, we must remember to understand, by this, the Syriac language, which became, after the Babylonish captivity, the vernacular tongue of the Jews. Its proper name is Aramæan, derived from Aram, who settled in these parts; and it is divided into Eastern and Western Aramæan. The former was the language of the Assyrian empire, and we find the messengers of Hezekiah saying to Rabshakeh, the Assyrian general, "We understand Syriac." After the empire was transferred from Nineveh to Babylon, the Jews, by residing there seventy years, began to adopt its language; but, when they returned and came under the Syrian kings, though Western Aramæan, the language of Antioch, became prevalent all around, they retained more of the Eastern dialect. These two differed very slightly, and both are so closely allied to Hebrew, that we cannot wonder at the Jews calling theirs Hebrew, for it was a dialect of that language. Not to speak of the apostolic gift of tongues, we may observe that Paul, whose native language was Greek, being educated in Jerusalem, acquired the command of Syriac, which procured him favourable audience in the country and metropolis of the Jews, who were prejudiced against their own countrymen of the Greek class. But they, hearing that he called out to them in their own tongue,

maintained the more silence, and he said what we have considered in the tenth Lecture, on the conversion of Paul.

To a great part of his audience, the apostle's narrative was new, though it is not to us, and he propitiates them, by observing, that he was once such a zealot for God, as they now were, that is, "with a zeal which was not according to knowledge." His religious education, under Gamaliel, and his appeal to the high priest and the Jewish elders, to those who journeyed with him to Damascus, and to Ananias, as witnesses, precluded all doubt of the truth of his assertions.

The narrative of his conversion was, on the one hand, so straightforward, so simple, and unadorned, so manifestly left to defend itself by its own internal evidence; and was delivered to an audience so furnished with all possible means of examining the witnesses, that no one can doubt of the speaker's sincerity; and on the other, was so rational, so adapted to the audience, and so calculated to plead his cause, without any mean concessions to prejudice, or supplications for favour, that all must feel the conviction that he was no fanatic. He believed, and deserved to be believed. This first opportunity which he ever enjoyed of relating his deeply-interesting story to his nation, at the centre of their religious unity, was also the last he was ever to have; for the repetition, which we shall hear, was delivered at Cesarea, almost a heathen city, in the Holy Land.

But who is not struck with the advantageous circumstances, which the providence of our Lord afforded to his chosen witness, for the delivery of his final testimony to the Jews? He was standing on the steps to the fort, guarded by the Roman troops which had conquered the land, and was speaking by an authority before which the world stood in awe. He commanded a view of the sacred courts below, filled with Jews, not only natives, but visitors from every land, forming that very assemblage of which it was said that "all Jerusalem," now crowded to excess, "is poured forth." Expected, perhaps, as accused by the Asiatic Jews, of perverting the Jews in all lands, to speak as a Hellenist, in a Grecian dialect, which was disliked as heathenish, he took them by surprise, and, for the moment, caught their favour, by a language which they cherished as semi-sacred. A profound silence enables him to reach the vast multitude

from his commanding position, and the whole story of Christ's appearance and commission was poured forth, as to a willing audience, ere that interruption arose, which changed the whole scene. To him who was "willing to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus," this was a privileged moment, perhaps the happiest of his apostolic life; that made him rejoice in the sufferings by which it was procured. Who, that had been blessed with such a conversion, would not have been delighted with such an opportunity of relating it to such an audience?

To the Jews it was a last message of mercy, on which hung their doom. The silent audience they afforded left them without the excuse of ignorance; the total absence of all argumentative reply proved their unbelief to be wilful, the effect of an alienated heart, rather than a mistaken mind; and the outcry which they at last raised, demonstrated, that, while they made Paul's opposition to his country the pretext for their enmity, they were not to be won by any proofs of patriotic love. Contempt, envy, and hatred to the Gentiles, was the reason!

III. THE ADDITIONAL NARRATIVE, which provoked the Jews to new rage. Ver. 17—21.

The apostle says, "It happened to me, when returned to Jerusalem, and I was praying in the temple, to be in an ecstasy, and to see him, saying to me, Haste, and go out quickly from Jerusalem; because they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they themselves know that I was imprisoning and beating in the synagogues those that believed on thee; and when the blood of Stephen, thy martyr, was shed, I was myself also standing by and consenting, and guarding the clothes of those who killed him. And he said to me, Go; for I to nations afar will send thee."

This passage opens to us a new and instructive leaf in the history of Paul, who referred to it, on this occasion, for important reasons. He was accused by those who raised the riot, of teaching men everywhere against the Jewish nation, and law, and temple; and even believing Jews had been prejudiced against him, by being informed that he went thus far in his opposition to the law of Moses. His life and labours spent among the Gentiles seemed to establish a charge so provoking

to the Jews. He now, however, showed that, instead of being alienated from his country, or its temple, he clung to them with benevolent solicitude, and almost obstinate pertinacity, till he was sent from that very temple, by the absolute authority of Christ, "far off to the Gentiles."

This happened, most probably, at the apostle's first visit to Jerusalem as a disciple, which, he tells the Galatians, was paid, three years after his conversion, and lasted fifteen days. The ecstasy, or transport, by which he was thrown out of himself, was exactly fourteen years before the first of Nero, and was probably thus described: "I knew a man," 2 Cor. xii. 2—5.

The reasons for doubting whether this was the vision in the temple, being derived from the nature of an ecstasy, are of little weight. That he was then praying in the temple, proves that, though he considered Christ had superseded all other sacrifices by his own; the shadowy ritual, being suffered to continue, was worthy of respect, as an instructive exhibition of Him, who, in "the temple of his body, put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Paul was praying in the temple for the Jews, and asking grace to preach Christ to them; for the Lord replied, "They will not receive thy testimony concerning me." That Lord, who had appeared on the road to Damascus, showed himself again to the apostle in the temple, saying, imperatively, "Haste, and go out quickly from Jerusalem." Such an answer to a prayer for grace to imitate those who were labouring for the conversion of the Jews, inflamed them against Jesus; as it must also have been a heavy blow to the apostle, for the reason assigned, "Because they will not receive thy testimony concerning me."

But, an opening seemed made for a kind of intercession in their behalf. Our Lord's prescience of responsible actions has been denied; but is here proved, both by his own prediction, and by the fulfilment. Immediately after this vision, the Greeks had sought to kill him; and at the moment when Paul was relating it, he had a fresh demonstration of its truth. But as love is ingenious in finding reasons for its own indulgence, and even for making duty yield to inclination, the apostle said, "Lord, they know how I was once seen here, dragging away to prisons, and beating in synagogues, those who believed in thee; and what an active part I took in shedding the blood

of thy martyr, Stephen ; too clearly proving my consent to the deed, by guarding the clothes of those who killed him." Many a time before, had the apostle, doubtless, confessed and bewailed this, at the feet of Jesus ; as he said to the Corinthians, " I am not worthy to be called an apostle, for I persecuted the church of God ;" but this is the only time that *we hear* of his pouring the confession into the Redeemer's bosom, and it seems that every word his lips uttered must have been a dagger to his heart. That Lord who pitied the sorrows of his servant's soul, and approved the humiliation and the benevolent compassion of the suppliant on behalf of Jerusalem, gently chided the approach to dispute with him about the duty and the events, by saying, imperatively, " Go, for I to nations afar will send *thee*." What we translate Gentiles, both in the Old Testament and the New, is strictly nations ; but the Jews thus called all other nations except themselves ; and the mention of those afar off, shows that Paul's mission was, not to Jerusalem, or Judea, but to remote nations, who were all Gentiles. This termination of the converse with his Lord, proved that Paul's affections lingered round that very people against whom he was accused of stirring up all the world, and that it required the authority of Christ to tear him from Jerusalem, and send him away to distant lands.

But, as an evil heart takes everything the wrong way, we are not surprised, though grieved, to find that, instead of being reconciled to Paul, they were inflamed against Jesus. They said in their hearts, " You have thrown off the blame from yourselves to him, and we hate you the more for his sake."

" For they continued to hear him, till this word," and then the mention of the Gentiles as the objects of Messiah's regard, instead of the Jews, provoked them to fury, and they lifted up their voice, saying, " Take from the earth such a one, for it is not fit for him to live." Not a word of argument is uttered to refute him, or justify the violence of their passion, while crying out and tearing off their clothes, and throwing dust into the air. By such acts they show themselves eager to treat him as when they threw off their garments to stone Stephen, and " the young man called Saul kept charge of them." Throwing up dust was designed to express their readiness to throw stones, if they could find them, at him whom they were vexed to see out

of the reach of their malice. Thus all things conspire, though by most unexpected ways, to fulfil Christ's words, "They will not receive thy testimony concerning me;" but "when I send to thee, O Jerusalem, wise men and scribes, thou wilt persecute and stone them, that upon thee may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth."

Was there no wise man among them? No, not one to say, "Men of Israel, why have you heard Paul so quietly hitherto, and now have lost your patience and your reason? Should not your zeal have burst forth before, if at all? You uttered not a word against Paul's narrative, of a vision from Jesus of Nazareth, in which he appealed to the high priest and elders and other witnesses, for the truth of his story. But if this was true, how could you blame him for that which so enraged you? Must he not be bound to obey this Jesus who appeared to him as Lord of all, first near Damascus, and then in the temple? Did not Paul prove himself reluctant to quit us, till absolute authority silenced his plea for us, and declared his kind intentions vain? And are you not now, by your very rage, proving that Jesus knew us too well? If Paul is sent far off to the Gentiles, are there no Christians left to testify among us Jews?"

But who shall say that there were none who thus reasoned within themselves to their own salvation, though hidden among the crowd? As to the majority, we are shocked to see how they overlook the Saviour, taking no notice at all of what is said of him, while enraged at the apostle for being sent to the Gentiles. But in this very temper we find the Jews to this day. They are ingenious in giving him the go-by; if I may be excused for employing that expressive vulgarism.

IV. THE INTERPOSITION OF THE ROMAN COMMANDER.

As the Tribune, Lysias, who seems to have stood by, did not understand the language in which Paul had been speaking, he could not divine the reason of the sudden change, but could well interpret the meaning of what he saw; and, therefore, he, knowing the riotous temper of the Jews, lest they should attempt to rush up the flight of steps, and seize Paul, ordered him to be brought into the barracks, or fort, telling those who executed this order, by stripes, to examine him, that is, to put him to the

question, or torture, by cruel beating. Lysias intended to force Paul to tell the meaning of that speech which so provoked the Jews, that they, from listening quietly, all at once broke out into violence; or "for what cause they so cried out against him." This, Lysias supposed, would let him into the secret of the whole affair, and teach him how to deal with the case.

But "as they stretched him out with thongs, commencing the cruel process of torture, Paul said to the Centurion standing by," to superintend the question, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" But the Centurion, having heard, coming up, told it to the commander, saying, "What are you going to do? for this man is a Roman." The boldness of this address to a superior officer, may be accounted for, by the alarm of the Centurion; by the men of the first families of Rome being found, during youth, in the lower ranks of the army; and by the commander being a Greek, whose violation of the rights of Roman citizenship would be dangerously offensive to Romans.

The Tribune, therefore, coming up, said to him, "Tell me; art thou a Roman? and he said, Yes." This could mean nothing but one who had the right of citizenship; for Paul had already told that he was a Jew, born at Tarsus. But the commander, deeming Paul a poor man, said with surprise, "I bought that citizenship for a great sum." And Paul said, "But I was even born a citizen." That the rights of a Roman citizen were, under the emperors, purchased, is matter of history, and, as usual, that was at last to be had for a vile price, which at first cost a great sum. Lysias is a Greek name, and, though Claudius is Roman, this prenomens seems to have been derived from adoption into the Claudian family. How Paul came to be free-born has been disputed; and Lardner, denying that Tarsus was a Roman colony, thinks that Paul's family had bought, or, for some services performed to Cæsar in the civil war, been rewarded with, the privileges of a Roman citizen.

Lysias, at first taking him for the Egyptian Jew impostor, was afterwards surprised to learn that he was a native of Tarsus, which would again lead to mistake, so that he said, with an air of incredulity, "Art thou a Roman?" "Immediately, therefore, they withdrew from him, who were going to put him to the torture; and the commander was afraid, knowing that he was

a Roman, and that he had bound him." This last refers, not to a mere binding, for security, which Lysias continued to do; but to that which was intended to torture, in order to force confession of the cause he had given for the rage of the Jews. There was reason to fear the consequences of thus treating a denizen of proud Rome, while uncondemned; for, only after conviction, might a Roman be treated as an outlaw who had forfeited all the privileges of a citizen; though slaves were tortured to make them convict themselves.

Lessons of the highest practical utility are here furnished by a Christian's narrative of conversion—his remembrance of former iniquities—his destination to a particular field of usefulness—and his deliverance in the hour of danger! What length of time, what extent of ability, could do justice to these themes?

As to that narrative of conversion which this chapter contains, it may be said, that Paul's rank, as an apostle, and the miraculous nature of his calling to the faith of Christ, remove the whole affair, far beyond ordinary use. But circumstances change not the essence of things, and Paul, as a believer, declares, that, "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Christ Jesus might show forth a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." We must all experience the same regenerating and justifying change, if we hope to meet him in the same heaven which he now enjoys. But our present question is, How should any Christian act, with regard to declaring the history of his conversion? That Paul wisely made this his theme, on the present occasion, who will deny? That some are too forward to plead his example,—I will not say, to imitate it,—must, I fear, be owned. For vanity may prompt us, and a desire to exalt ourselves may lurk under the mask of solicitude to magnify the grace of God. A hypocrite may take great delight in thinking, and making others think, that he is a special favourite of heaven, some great one among the elect. Nor should it ever be forgotten, that telling the story of our conversion may generate, and foster, the most perilous habit of resting the evidence on our ability to narrate it as a past event; while the true criterion of its reality is its present effect. As there are false conversions, so there are stories of false conversions, as well as of the true. Think you not that Simon Magus, before his detection, could have told how he thought, and felt, and acted,

when it was said "he believed and was baptized?" An account, very clear, connected, consistent, and sincere too, may be given of a change, that, after all, falls short of change of heart and of state towards God. But, "enough of this," some will say: I wish it may prove so.

Now let us turn to the other side. Our conversion to God may be clearly proved by its effects, and very satisfactorily known and enjoyed, when the development of it may have been so gradual, and so destitute of marked circumstances of time and means, that nothing like a clear narrative of the event, can, with sincerity, be told. Not all the apostles were as miraculously changed as Paul, and the sovereign Lord still calls his people in various ways, some by a very early blessing on pious education, and others by a very marked and sudden transformation. Vast differences there must be in their ability to narrate the affair to others? But, as, in all this, God designs to promote his own glory, and the future usefulness of his people; who shall forbid a man of marked and instructive experience, to say, "Come, and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he has done for my soul"? Should Paul have hidden his wondrous tale in his own breast; or told it to all the world? Was it not fit, that, when the disciples at Jerusalem were afraid of him as their old persecutor, Barnabas should tell the story of the change which Paul first related to him? Have we not narratives of the primitive Christians who, on relating to the church their conversion, were received with the shout, "This our brother was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found"? Is it not a fit moment for such a relation, when we say to the church of God, "We will go with you; for we have found that God is with you"? Does not the apostle say, "Receive ye one another as Christ has received you, to the glory of God"?

But after our reception into the church, occasions may arise, to demand an acknowledgment of what God has wrought for us. Then, to make our modest reserve yield to the call of duty, the glory of our Redeemer, the edification of his church, and the salvation of others, will be conducive to our own edification, by "calling to remembrance the former days, when, after we were illuminated, we endured a great fight of afflictions," and struggled out of a fallen world into the redeemed church, and took our place in the fellowship of the saints. Does our heavenly Father

say, "I remember the love of thine espousals," the days of thy youthful religion, and shall not we reply; I remember it too? What can be more conducive to humility, gratitude, love, zeal, and sacred courage, in the cause of religion?

The remembrance of former iniquity has been so recently glanced at, that I shall not here enlarge, though I must, for a moment, delay. For who can think of Paul's position in the presence of Christ, and listen to the apostle's address, without feeling something like compassion for one so circumstanced? Must we not all sympathise with David, when he says to God, "Remember not against me former iniquities"? What, then, are we to think of one, that reminds Christ of these, shall I say? He needed not to be reminded; yet God says, "Put me in remembrance," and the apostle does so. What the conflict of emotions in his breast, at that moment, must have been, I pretend not to describe; for no one can conceive. Had it been possible for us to be present, and to have spoken, at that moment, we should have shrunk, as from the very refinement of cruelty, from the slightest allusion to what Paul here mentions of his former treatment of the disciples of Christ. See, then, what it is to sin against Christ, and what it may cost us, one day, to be called to think of what we have done. Are there any here who are going on in sin, with the avowed hope that they shall, one day, repent. What will you then think of what you are now doing?

But compassion for the Jews and the hope of bringing good to them, and glory to Christ, overcame Paul's repugnance and shame, by a boundless confidence in Christ's forgiveness, free, full, and immutable. He could tell the Saviour and Judge, how well his enemies knew all that his apostle had once done against him; because that apostle could say, "I obtained mercy. I know he has heartily forgiven me, and will remember my iniquities against me no more." May we not learn from this, how we shall be able to remember, in heaven, what we had been on earth, blessing "Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood," without dreading him before whom we make this, which I may call a confession, as well as thanksgiving; because we shall have a boundless confidence in the perfection of his forgiveness, and its unchangeable duration?

The destination of Christ's servants to a particular field of usefulness is specially a minister's theme; but everything which

concerns the ministry, interests the whole church. The apostle, who yearned to convert the Jews, were it at the price of his liberty or life, was told they would not receive his testimony, and is sent far off to the Gentiles. Peter is made the apostle of the circumcision. Dr. Campbell thinks they are mistaken, who suppose Paul, from his Grecian birthplace, was best fitted to preach to Gentiles, and Peter, from being a native of Palestine, was most suited to the Jews. The shrewd northern divine pronounces decisively in favour of the opposite opinion, maintaining that the Redeemer designed to confound all human reasonings, and prove his sovereign right, and almighty power, to use what instruments he pleases, where he pleases, by sending Paul, with his rabbinical education, to Gentiles, who cared not for it. To me it appears certain, that there is no subject on which ministers are more likely to be mistaken, than in their reasonings about the fittest sphere for themselves. Of this our Lord alone is a competent judge. For he often intends to accomplish the mightiest and most beneficial purposes, by the most unlikely means. Witness the subduing of the world, with all its might and all its philosophy, by a corps of Jewish fishermen, and a tent-maker. Of this I am sure, that he has not left the choice of a field to ourselves. Our sole business is to ascertain his will, and go in his strength, at his bidding, wherever it may be ; and there abide till he says, " I will send thee far hence." No tastes, or attachments, no love of places or persons, no wishes of wife or children, no aspiring after ease, or profit, or fame, must, for a moment, be listened to, if we would not run in vain, or labour in vain. He that chose the objects of his calling determined the time, and place, and instruments, and caused Peter to say, " You know that, a good while ago, God made choice that, by my mouth, the Gentiles should hear the word and believe." After this, Paul must go to the Gentiles and Peter to the circumcision. We may reason speciously and plead earnestly, for a certain sphere, but shall be cut short, by the voice that says, " Go ; for I will send thee far hence." We are neither our own masters nor our own guides ; but when we give ourselves to the ministry, we resign our free will,—shall I say ? yes ; we freely resign it to a higher will, and say, " Here am I, send me where thou wilt." Whoever has done any good in the earth will own, that it has been effected, not by his own counsel, but by the overruling

providence of Him who "leads the blind by a way they know not;" and chooses, by whose mouth men shall believe.

The deliverance which our Lord affords to his servants, in the hour of danger, is again pressed, I might say forced, upon our notice. When the Jews would have killed Paul, without hearing another word from his lips, the Romans rushed down, as if an angel were sent from heaven, and snatching him from their grasp, provided him with a pulpit and an audience, while the Jews, by force of their own prejudices, gave him a quiet hearing. When, again, their fury broke out, he was led into a secure castle, and the masters of the world were his body-guard. But here the protectors become the persecutors, and prepare to put him to the torture. Who shall save him now? That Lord, who reprov'd kings for his sake, saying, "Do my prophets no harm." A word from Paul's lips disarms the men that awed the world. The despised Jew says, "Civis Romanus sum;" I am a Roman citizen; at which kings trembled on their thrones, and tyrants relaxed their grasp. His bonds drop, and the tribune, who awed the Jews, is "afraid, because he has bound Paul." When his parents handed down to him the rights and honours of a Roman citizen, could they have expected that this would raise a wall of fire round an apostle of Christ? These are thy ways, Lord God Almighty; who shall not fear thee, and glorify thy name?

The twenty-fifth Lecture unfolds the effect which reconciles us to the arrest recorded in that which precedes; so that, though we shall not again see Paul at liberty, we shall not be "ashamed of his bonds."

LECTURE XXVI.

PAUL'S RESCUE FROM THE JEWISH SANHEDRIM.

ACTS xxii. 30—xxiv. to the end.

“ RUN to and fro, through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth, and I will pardon it. And though they say, ‘The Lord liveth, surely they swear falsely. O Lord! are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return. Therefore, I said, Surely these are poor, they are foolish; for they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God. I will get me to the great men, and will speak unto them, for they have known the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God; but these have altogether broken the yoke and burst the bonds.’” Jeremiah v. 1—5.

The treatment which we lately saw Paul endure, may be said to have been from the mob. To-day we shall see how he is treated in the ecclesiastical court.

As soon as he declared his rights, and claimed his privilege as a Roman citizen, Lysias, who had been provoked to put him to the torture, became his bland and faithful preserver, as if he

had been appointed the guardian-angel of the persecuted saint. That this was not all pure disinterested friendship, must be admitted; for, a regard to his own safety made the tribune anxious to propitiate a Roman citizen, who might have accused him of violating the majesty of the empire; and, before the people at Rome, if the citizen could obtain another Cicero for his advocate, he might have made the proudest tremble.

Lysias, therefore, after having procured for his *protégé* an audience in the most respectable tribunal of the Jews, seized an opportunity of ridding himself of a perilous charge, by handing Paul over to the supreme Roman authority, in the person of Felix, the Procurator of Syria.

The apostle thus escaped the turbulence and rage of what was called the Holy City, but was, in reality, as Isaiah said, the city of blood. Paul's appearance before the Sanhedrim, and his removal to Cesarea, will divide our time.

I. THE APPEARANCE BEFORE THE SANHEDRIM.

This was a most important era, both for the apostle, as Christ's witness, and for the Jewish nation, who might previously have said, "Why did Paul, who had once been sent by the authorities of his people, to oppose Jesus of Nazareth, ever afterwards appear only before individuals or the rude multitude, and never give an account of his change to the heads of the church, the appointed judges of ecclesiastical affairs?" If, however, we find him now doing so, we owe no thanks to them for affording the opportunity, but to Lysias; while their violent conduct shows why our Lord did not suffer Paul to return to them, after his conversion. "For, on the morrow, Lysias wishing to know the certainty why he was accused of the Jews, loosed him from the soldiers, and ordered, as a master, the high priest and all the Sanhedrim to meet, and, bringing Paul down, placed him among them."

"But Paul, having gazed" at the Sanhedrim, as one who had no reason to be appalled, "said, Brethren, I, in all good conscience towards God, have acted as a citizen until this day." I suppose he used a word which expressed citizenship, because, having just pleaded his rights as a Roman citizen, he here intended to show that he had always felt and acted as a good citizen; and to declare before Lysias that he was no profligate

rioter, like the Egyptian, but a man of conscientious life. He constantly declared, that, in the days of unbelief, "touching the righteousness of the law he was blameless, and thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth;" and, while persecuting, he was acting under authority, and considered a good citizen of the civil state. Since then, he taught "every soul to be subject to the higher powers." But as the apostle had merely called the Sanhedrim "men," who, as Jews, were his brothers, and had addressed no high priest, the pride of Ananias was wounded; and lest the bold assertion of a uniformly conscientious course, not to be contradicted, should produce a favourable impression on the Roman commander, Ananias "ordered those who were standing by him to smite him on the mouth." This, which shocks us, was common in the East, and is said to have been done with the heel of a shoe, so violently, that the teeth were sometimes knocked out. I suspect the infamous order was not actually obeyed, on account of the presence of Lysias, who was the Jews' master and Paul's protector. Then Paul said, "God is about to smite thee, whited wall; and thou sittest judging me according to the law, and, violating law, commandest me to be smitten!" God strictly forbade the Jews to deal oppressively in judgment; and who would not have been indignant to see a judge acting thus to a prisoner, at the very commencement of his trial and defence? The high priest called "a whited wall," reminds us of the Pharisees compared to "whited sepulchres;" for their walls, made of mud, and white-washed, were fit images of a corrupt heart, under specious appearances of sanctity. That Paul spoke not the language of passion, but uttered a prediction of what God was about to do to the unjust judge, I cannot doubt. Christ expressly charged his apostles, "When they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto the magistrates and powers, take ye no thought how, or what thing, ye shall answer, or what ye shall say." Luke xii. 11. "For it shall be given you in the same hour what ye shall speak." Matt. x. 19; Luke xxi. 14. If ever there was occasion for the fulfilment of this promise, it was at this moment. But they who were standing by, said, "The high priest of God thou art reviling!" And Paul said, "I knew not, brethren, that there is a high priest; for, it is written, The ruler of thy people thou shalt not curse." Thus we render the

Hebrew, Exod. xxii. 28, of which the Greek version is the same as the apostle gives.

But here great difficulties arise, and numerous solutions are proposed. That Paul did not acknowledge any man to be high priest, after Christ came, is the assertion of some, but is not true; since "there are priests," he says, "according to the law." The version I have given is most exact, and expresses the state of affairs at that time, when, so frequent were the changes that there were three high priests in a year, and one priest acted for another, who was sent to Rome to answer before Cæsar. If the historian of the Acts, who wrote afterwards, calls Ananias high priest, because he was, at that time, acting and owned by a party, as such (though rabbinical writers call him Sagan). Paul did not know that there was, in reality, a high priest. To say that Ananias must have occupied, in his pontifical robes, the seat appropriated to the high priest, is contrary to Jewish antiquities; and Lysias probably seated himself as judge and arbiter, where he was the real master. As Paul, who did not know there was a high priest, might not have seen the person, though he perceived that from one of the ecclesiastical authorities the order came, this was overruled by Him who inspired the prediction, that God was about to smite the unjust judge.

Soon after deposed, his name is not found in the catalogue of high priests, and he was killed most ignominiously in the sewers by the *sicarii*, or murderers, whom he scrupled not to employ against Paul. The apostle owns the moral force of the law, "Thou shalt not curse the ruler of thy people;" but declares that the malediction fell upon this man, in consequence of the state of affairs, leaving Paul in ignorance that there was a high priest, who had given the order to smite. With *us*, he might have pleaded his prophetic inspiration, as an apostle; for the prophets, acting under the impulse of the Sovereign Lord, often pronounced a curse on rulers; but, in the Jewish court, he pleaded the uncertainty concerning the high priest. This, I conceive, was the reason why no answer was returned to the defence which the apostle makes; though it has created so much perplexity to commentators. It may be said, indeed, that Paul appealed to the high priest and elders in his address, on the steps, to the multitude; but this was to verify his assertion that he had received letters from them to Damascus, which refers to

a much earlier period ; and if that high priest, who gave to Saul the letters of persecution, were still living, it would only render it the more doubtful whether the one, before whom Paul was now standing, were high priest at all ; or were even supposed to be such, by the well-informed Jews, who revered their law. They who believe that God fulfilled this prediction will acquit the apostle.

"Paul, knowing that the one part is of Pharisees and the other of Sadducees, cried out in the Sanhedrim, Brethren, I am a Pharisee, son of a Pharisee ; concerning hope and resurrection of the dead, I am judged. And he having spoken this, there was a riot of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit ; but the Pharisees confess both. And there was a great outcry, and the Scribes of the party of the Pharisees fought, saying, Nothing evil do we find in this man : and if a spirit has spoken to him, or an angel ;"—the words, "Let us not fight against God," the best manuscripts reject, and the Syriac does not contain. To me, it appears that they were taken from a reference (perhaps in the margin) to chapter v. 39, in order to supply what seemed an hiatus, which, however, really arose from the tumult not allowing the Pharisees to complete their sentence ; or, at least, not suffering the last words to be heard.

The Sadducees, censured by Josephus, denied the resurrection and the existence of spirits ; being a species of materialists, not far removed from Deism, whom Christ confuted, by appealing to what God says to Moses in the bush ; and thus far Jesus took part with the Pharisees. That Paul was, "as touching the law, a Pharisee," and on that which was then *the* question, no less a Pharisee for being a Christian, was manifest ; for he spent his life in proclaiming Christ's resurrection as the pledge of ours. Nor could the Sanhedrim suppose that he intended anything more. They denied not his assertion.

But while Paul waked up the Pharisees' zeal for that in which they differed from the opposite party ; observe how they shun the Redeemer, and instead of saying, "If Jesus of Nazareth has," as Paul declares, "risen and spoken to him ;" they substitute, "If an angel or a spirit has spoken, we find no evil in him." That they fought in a solemn court of judicature

seems strange ; but the Jews were in a strangely riotous state, and the Pharisees being the majority, employed the argument of force against their opponents.

Where the disputants fought, the riot must have been great, and Lysias, "fearing least Paul should be torn to pieces by them, one party pulling to save, and the other to destroy, ordered, by a sign, the military, going down, to snatch him from the midst of them and lead him into the fort." This care of Paul may have arisen, both from the interest which Lysias now took in him, and from the fear of being accused, if an innocent Roman citizen, whom he had once attempted to torture, should lose his life, being torn to pieces while under the guard of the tribune. For he had, doubtless, ordered that this trial, which was instituted that he might know, with certainty, why Paul was accused, should be conducted in Greek ; and thus Lysias found that the riot, this day, explained that of yesterday, and proved that, not civic crimes, but questions of Jewish faith, created the wrath, and fury, and attempts on Paul's life ; so that, though he lived as a good citizen, he was hated as a bad Jew.

II. PAUL'S REMOVAL FROM JERUSALEM TO CESAREA. Verse 5.

This, preceded by a vision from the Lord, was occasioned by a murderous conspiracy of the Jews, and executed by the military force of the Romans.

1. *The vision*: verse 11. "The following night, the Lord, standing by him, said, Courage ; for, as thou hast testified concerning me at Jerusalem, so is it necessary for thee also at Rome to testify." The word "Paul" does not belong to the text, and it certainly was not necessary. We read of no Christian friends standing by, in his trial, which, however, is no absolute proof that they did not ; and if this were the case, they may have been excluded by force. But, the night after this second conflict, which was the more severe as it was now with the authorities of the nation, the Lord stood by his servant. If all other friends were shut out, that "friend who sticketh closer than a brother," and who was to Paul more than all the world, visits his chamber, and lights it up with glory. For, though he had stood by, through the whole scene, he was invisible and inaudible, working no miracle, securing his servant by human means. He was

not, however, unmindful that his faithful ambassador had been beaten sorely, with a design to kill him, and had, day after day, withstood singly the rage of the mob, and the authority and learning of the Sanhedrim; enough, it might be said, to break down a body of iron and a soul of adamant. But such a visit as this would heal any bruises, was a counterpoise to any discouragements; being at once the sweetest recompence for the past, and the surest pledge of future triumph. For that word "courage," uttered by the lips of the Captain of Salvation, gave what he inculcated, and what it implied that Paul needed. For let us not suppose, when we see apostles and confessors stand as a rock, unshaken by the dashing waves, that they had no inward conflicts with unbelieving fears, and with human tendencies to impatience under sufferings and injustice. This would remove them from the class of useful examples, and defeat the end for which their conflicts are put on record. Paul says, "Without were fightings, and within were fears." But when Christ speaks "courage," fears flee as the shades of night before the rising sun, and fightings are welcomed as the means of seizing the conqueror's crown.

The approbation expressed: "Thou hast testified concerning me at Jerusalem," puts to flight the strange suspicions entertained by some of the propriety of Paul's coming to Jerusalem, of his compliance with the advice of James, his denunciation of Ananias, and his declaring himself a Pharisee. For, where our Lord expresses nothing but approbation, who dares utter a whisper, or indulge a suspicion, of anything else? But, when Christ rewards past battles with a promise of new victories, in a more public field, saying, "Thou must bear witness to me at Rome also;" it is beautifully observed, "The Saviour gives them the kisses of his mouth, who, for his sake, have been smitten on the mouth."

He knew the heart of his servant, who longed "to fill up what was behind of the sufferings of Christ in his flesh, for his body's sake, which is the church." If this one thing remained, it must be done, and it opened a new way of indulging the apostle with the object of his wish; for, next to his longing for the salvation of his brethren according to the flesh, was his desire to see Rome. Our Lord now informs him that he shall bear testimony to the Saviour of the world, in the capital of the

world, without saying that it shall be as a prisoner in chains. For his bonds had been already most severe; and we have a friend, so considerate and tender, as to "have many things yet to say to us which we cannot bear now." It is, however, not improbable that the apostle, who had pleaded his rights as a Roman citizen, and knew that such a one was often reserved for the tribunal of the emperor, may have anticipated the necessity of appealing to Cæsar, by which means he was at last sent to bear witness at Rome. But though the stoutest heart might have quailed at the prospect of standing a prisoner, to be tried by Nero; Paul had already written, "I am debtor to Greeks and barbarians, and I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also; for, I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." To such a man, what could be more welcome than to know, from such lips, that, as he had delivered his testimony in Jerusalem, the holy, the metropolis of God's worshippers; his Lord would grant him the same honour in imperial Rome, the victorious, the head of the idolatrous world. Serving Christ faithfully in a small sphere, is rewarded by promotion to a larger; and he that had been faithful in a few things was made ruler over many cities. But with the honour comes the cross; and we have now to trace the steps by which the apostle was conducted to Rome, amidst perils by land and by sea, but cheered on, all the way, by that voice divine,—"Courage! for as thou hast borne witness to me at Jerusalem, so must thou testify to me at Rome also."

2. *A murderous conspiracy of the Jews* is now disclosed: ver. 12—21. But after such a night of heavenly visitation and consolation as the servant of Christ had enjoyed, we are not surprised to hear of trouble, and to learn, that, when it was day, the Jews, hating Paul, both because they *had* injured and had *not* killed him, "having made a conspiracy, anathematised themselves, engaging neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul." Though we should scarcely have expected four could be found so mad, there were more than forty who had taken that oath; and men will do in company what any one of them would abhor to do alone. Coming to the chief priests and elders, they said, "With an anathema we have anathematised, by a curse bound ourselves to taste nothing as long as we have not killed Paul. Now, therefore, do you make a pretence to the chiliarch

(Lysias) with the Sanhedrim, that he may to-morrow bring him down to you, as if about to investigate more accurately things that concern him; but we, before his coming near, are prepared to kill him."

Such was the conspiracy, to which the zealots were provoked by a second, or rather third, escape of the apostle from their grasp. That men should fancy they could lay themselves under a moral obligation to do the most immoral acts, is one of the mysteries of iniquity which show the depths of Satan in the human heart. The vows, which God never originally instituted, were sanctioned, only to do good things; and, as to evil, the sin lies in making the vow; and the only reparation we can make, is by breaking it. Far must they have departed from the law, and the religion for which they professed to be so zealous, when they made a vow to murder a man. But these are the most furious zealots of a system, who really care least about its due effects upon themselves.

And this is not the worst; for these forty conspirators were the poor and ignorant. "I will get me," says the prophet, "to the great and the learned, the scribes and the priests." Lo, these hear, with all complaisance and compliance, the horrid proposal; though ways of loosing men from the obligation of a vow are prescribed by the Talmud, and they knew that the law had provided release even from innocent vows. But they evidently had adopted the jesuitical maxim, that the end sanctifies the means; as the high priest haughtily told them, in Christ's case, they knew nothing, if they did not know that it was necessary to kill one man, however innocent, rather than ruin the whole nation. Again, we hear the prophet say, "As troops of robbers lie in wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent." For the good of the church, have priests sanctioned murder, and every other crime; for, if they are not the best of men, they are likely to become the worst. But Christ had appeared, and promised Paul that he should see Rome; and vain is the fury of ignorant zealots, or the more guilty hypocrisy of high priests, to murder him at Jerusalem. "For Paul's nephew, the son of his sister, having heard of the ambush, coming up, and entering into the fort, told Paul." Here pleasures unexpected meet us, to compensate for horrors which astonish. As Paul tells the Romans to "salute his kins-

men who were in Christ," we may suppose that this nephew was such a one; but if not, and the youth, being a Jew, was let into their secret, it is still a consoling thought, that he so justly condemned the conduct of his countrymen, though sanctioned by their priests. It is also pleasant to learn that Lysias, who commanded in the fort, made it accessible to Paul's friends; and as we should not have known the visit of this young man, but for the information he brought, so we may hope that many a kind Christian visit was, on this spot, paid to the apostle, which there was no occasion to put on record.

"But Paul, having called one of the centurions, said, Lead this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him. He, therefore, having taken him, brought him to the tribune, and said, The prisoner, Paul, having called me, asked to bring this young man to thee, having something to say to thee. The tribune, having taken his hand, and retired apart, inquired, What is it that you have to tell me? But he said, that the Jews have engaged to ask thee, that, to-morrow, thou wouldst bring down Paul unto the Sanhedrim; as if they were going to inquire more accurately concerning him. Do thou, therefore, not be persuaded by them; for there are lying in ambush for him more than forty men of them, who have anathematised themselves neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now, they are ready, expecting the promise from thee. The tribune, therefore, dismissed the young man, ordering him—'Tell nobody that thou hast disclosed these things to me.' And, having called two of the centurions, he said, Get ready two hundred soldiers, that they may go as far as Cesarea, and seventy cavalry, and two hundred lancers, from the third hour of the night; and furnish beasts, that, having mounted Paul, they may safely present him to Felix, the governor: having written an epistle, embracing this form:—

"Claudius Lysias to the supreme governor, Felix, greeting: This man, taken by the Jews, and being about to be killed by them, coming up with the military, I rescued; having learned that he is a Roman. But wishing to know the charge on what account they accused him, I brought him down to their Sanhedrim, whom I found accused concerning questions of their law, but having nothing charged worthy of death, or of bonds. But a conspiracy having been mentioned to me, against the man, as

about to be executed, by the Jews ; immediately I have sent to thee, ordering, also, the accusers to say before thee, what they have against him. Farewell."

The way in which our Redeemer executed his purposes, and fulfilled his promise to the apostle, demands the devout attention and grateful admiration of the church. Paul's kindred according to the flesh, over whom he wept and prayed, are made to reward his benevolent solicitude ; for, if his nephew was not a convert to Christ, the love of kindred was employed to make him revolt at their murderous vow, and become the instrument of his uncle's escape. The manner in which Paul improved the information given him, teaches that our duty lies, not in presuming upon God's fulfilment of his purposes, but in the use of all those means for our safety which he may put into our hands. The easy access which Lysias afforded to Paul's nephew, and the taking of the young man by the hand, and the prompt use made of the detection of the conspiracy, display the truth of that word, "The heart of princes is in the hand of the Lord."

But the letter which Lysias wrote must have excited your surprise, and, perhaps, your censure. He says, "I rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman ;" though he had previously rescued him, and had attempted to torture him, from which Paul escaped, by pleading that he was a Roman. But, under a despotic government, where truth is considered dangerous, Lysias deemed it politic to claim the credit of the rescue because he knew what the man was, rather than to confess he had commenced the torture, not knowing he was a Roman. The despotism of the Chinese, and other governments, is said to fill them with falsehood and deceit ; for freedom should be valued by Christians as essential to frankness, sincerity, and truth. The innocence of Paul, as a citizen of the civil state, was sufficiently attested, by the letter of Lysias ; and the guilt of the Jews was so exposed in the account of their conduct towards him, that all things promised a favourable result before Felix.

The Vulgate has an additional verse, which is unsupported by the Greek, and seems to have slipped in from the margin, where it stood as a comment on the conduct of Lysias, in sending with Paul such a military force : "for he was afraid lest the Jews should seize and kill him ; and lest he himself should be charged with having taken a bribe."

3. *Behold, now, the removal of the apostle, effected by the military force of the Romans.* Ver. 31. "The soldiers, therefore, according to the order given to them, having taken up Paul, brought him, by night, to Antipatris." The apostle, waked at the third hour of the night, and ordered to accompany a military escort, may have been, not only surprised, but alarmed, till he called to remembrance the discovery which his nephew had made to the tribune, and reflected that this might be the way by which his kind and faithful Lord intended to remove him from Jerusalem to Rome. But who can see the apostle mounted on the fleet beast, surrounded by a guard of honour, infantry and cavalry drawn out to attend him, as a prince, without supposing that he would say to himself, as he passed out of the gates of Jerusalem, "How different from the hour when I entered, 'not knowing the things that would befall me here'! What! Is an army raised to defend me, and to guard me against thy snares, O my country? These are thy works of faithfulness and truth, O Christ, who couldest have commanded more than twelve legions of thy angels, but hast chosen to employ, for my protection, the conquering legions of Rome!"

Thus escorted, (as never prophet, or apostle, before, or since,) Paul arrived at Antipatris, which demands more notice than it usually obtains. For the two hundred infantry left him here, and returned to the fort Antonia; because Paul had now passed beyond the jurisdiction of the high priest, and the other authorities of Judea, and had come into a different district, that of Samaria. Capharsabe seems to have been the ancient name, which Herod, who enlarged and adorned the place, exchanged for the name of his father, Antipater. It was in the fertile vale of Sharon, which extends from Cæsarea to Joppa.

All danger from the ambush of the Jews being passed, "on the morrow, the expeditious cavalry alone accompanied Paul, and having entered Cæsarea and given up the letter to the governor," of Syria, "they presented also Paul to him. And he, having read, and asked of what district he is, and being informed that he was of Cilicia; I will hear thee, he said (to Paul), be when thine accusers also are come. And he ordered him to kept in Herod's prætorium."

Paul was now at the seat of government, which Herod had made a city of palaces, in honour of his patrons, the Cæsars;

and where he had reared his own palace, surrounded by the military quarters called the prætorium. Here the apostle dwelt, a state prisoner, for two years; the most quiet period of his apostolic life, having been conducted hither, under the honourable designation of a Roman citizen, snatched from the violence of the Jews, and, for the dignity of the empire, placed under the wings of its eagles.

The horrible effects of false religion here stand out with alarming prominence. While the Scriptures teach us that nothing but the truth will produce safety for eternity, or holiness on earth; men indulge in vain speculations on the innocence of error, affirming that all religions are alike acceptable to our Maker, provided we are but sincere. But Paul, who declared, he "verily thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth," confessed, with grief and shame, that he was "not worthy to be called an apostle, because he had persecuted the church of God." If all kinds of religions were equally safe, provided we sincerely embraced them, why should they not be equally efficient to make us holy and beneficent?

But, tell me, what crimes has not false religion produced? Whether you consider that religion which God never gave, which, however sincerely adopted, is still but a lie taken for truth; or whether you view that religion which God taught, but which man has corrupted and turned into another, an opposite thing; all that is not according to the mind of God, produces effects contrary to the nature and will of God. See the high priest of the fallen corrupted Jewish church, commanding Paul, when preparing to defend himself, to be smitten on the mouth. See forty of the Jews binding themselves with an oath to God, not to eat or drink till they had killed Paul; and the ecclesiastical authorities consenting and plotting with them to commit the murder. See a corrupted Christianity raising crusades, forming inquisitions, shedding blood in torrents, burning men alive, and polluting the earth with crimes so foul, that nothing but the last conflagration shall burn out the stain. As our Redeemer declares that it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for those cities to which he had preached in vain; so everything conspires to prove, that guilt of the deepest dye, and crimes

most atrocious, are to be found, not only among professors of a religion originally and absolutely false, but especially where a revelation from heaven has been corrupted, perverted, and abused, to sanction such crimes as the Jews committed against Christ and the apostles, or such as the Papacy has perpetrated against the liberties and lives of mankind. It is the corruption of the best things that produces the worst.

But what triumphs has persecution unintentionally prepared for true religion! The Jewish Sanhedrim, that would not have deigned to give Paul a hearing, from the time that he left their service, to devote himself to that of the despised Jesus of Nazareth, is compelled, by a Roman commander, to assemble, and to behold Saul of Tarsus standing boldly among them, to proclaim his reasons for believing in Jesus. The brutal order of an unjust judge, to smite the mouth of him who had dared to assert his own innocence, seems not to have been obeyed, but it drew forth a sentence of judgment which heaven executed, by smiting the whited wall. The murderous conspiracy to kill Paul was detected by Him to whom nothing is secret, and elicited that love of kindred which repaid those yearnings of heart that the apostle felt for his kinsmen according to the flesh. But, instead of a band of forty murderers waylaying the apostle, and leaving his bloody corpse on the road; a guard of nearly three hundred Roman troops escorts him out of the reach of his enemies, and places him in quiet, for two years, where the noblest opportunities are afforded him of enjoying the fondest wish of his heart, —to bear witness to Christ before governors and kings. Persecutors we must pity, but persecution we may brave; for it “is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you who are troubled, rest.”

But what language could do justice to the faithful love of Christ to his devoted servants? Who would not go through great tribulations, for the sake of enjoying those visits of kindness and consolation which He affords to his suffering saints? Perhaps it had been some time since Paul had enjoyed one of these tokens of his Saviour’s love, and the midnight silence had often been broken by the apostle’s cry,

“Oh, show thyself to me,
Or take me up to thee.”

Well; the time was come to administer this strong cordial to him who, day after day, had sustained a mighty conflict. The Lord appears; the fort Antonia becomes the gate of heaven; the midnight darkness is chased away by the Sun of righteousness; the tumult of the thoughts is hushed by the voice that says, "Courage;" the anxieties concerning the result of all these struggles with the Jews, are allayed by the assurance that the desire of his soul should be given him, in bearing witness to Christ at Rome. Oh, hear it, and "praise the Lord, all ye his servants; and laud him, all ye that love him. For Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

Lecture the twenty-sixth has conducted us, in attendance on the apostle of the Gentiles, to the seat of their rule over the Jews, Cæsarea, where the justice of God's judgment, in transferring the dominion from Israel to the heathen, will often be displayed.

LECTURE XXVII.

PAUL'S EXAMINATION BEFORE FELIX.

ACTS xxiv.

As "our Father who is in heaven" has chosen to illustrate and endear his parental relation to us, by means of ours towards our children ; he, holding, also, another relation, that of Moral Governor, has, by civil government, suggested the idea of his own rectoral character, and our responsibility. A trial in a court of law should, therefore, be viewed, not merely as a means of securing to every one his due, but as a school of high intellectual and moral instruction. Here we behold man as a rational creature ; not ruled, as the beasts, by brute force, but having a loftier nature, in which is seated a deep conviction of the essential distinction between right and wrong ; and a cultivated mind, which has drawn out into form the processes of equity, that put honour on civil government, and teach the virtuous members of society to sustain it as "an ordinance of God for good." Here we learn, also, to anticipate the great Assize, when God himself will judge the world. Alas ! that government should ever have been perverted to mischief, as we shall see it, this day. Here are the accusation of Paul by the Advocate of the Jews—the apostle's defence—and the consequences which followed.

I. THE ACCUSATION BY THE ADVOCATE OF THE JEWS.
Ver. 1—9.

We are almost amused to think how the conspirators, who had spread their net to seize Paul, on the way to his trial, were disappointed. "But, after five days, descended Ananias, the high priest, with the elders, and a rhetorician, one Tertullus, all of whom informed the governor against Paul. But he, having been called, Tertullus began to accuse." How must these unscrupulous men have felt mortified, at being compelled to meet in court him whom they were known to have intended to kill on the road!

Felix had, on first seeing Paul, "said, I will hear thee when thy accusers are come;" showing that he expected them, having confirmed the order, which the letter of Lysias expressed. As it was a journey of two days, the going and coming occupied four, and but little time was left to the enemy for preparation. Paul needed none. The Pharisees had made up their quarrel with the Sadducees, or these, being in power, because the high priest was a Sadducee, had brought with them as many of those called elders as adhered to the Sadducean sect. They hired Tertullus, whom I have called a rhetorician, for *ρήτωρ* expresses one who taught rhetoric, as well as delivered orations. The Jews, having no such persons of their own nation, seem to have feed a Greek, or Roman, as the name indicates. Paul, treated as a Roman citizen, was called into court, to have the accuser and the accused face to face, when Tertullus began to accuse, saying,—“Much peace obtaining through thee, and reformation being made for this nation by thy forethought, we accept, in every case, and everywhere, mighty Felix, with all thankfulness. But, that I may not detain thee, I entreat thee to hear us briefly, through thy indulgence.” This flattering exordium was calculated to produce a false impression; for Felix was so infamous for lust and cruelty as to be utterly unfit for his station, and was detested by the Jews. Even the Roman historian declares, that this brother of Pallas, the favourite of Nero, committed all manner of atrocities, “exercising, in the spirit of a slave, the authority of a king.” But he put down, with violence, the banditti who had infested the country, for twenty years. Not that Felix did this for the sake of the Jews, but that he alone might plunder. Tertullus, however, availing

himself of the principle, that it is better to have one tyrant than a thousand, complimented Felix on the happy reformation.

The word Providence, which occurs in our version, being our term for something divine, I have exchanged for forethought; as it is here ascribed, not to God, but to a heathen governor. This is the only scriptural text in which providence is mentioned, though it is our generic term for that superintendence of God over all his works, which is so abundantly taught in his word. Thus, when some object that the phrase, satisfaction for sin, is not found in Scripture; we reply, that it is a comprehensive term for what is most fully revealed,—“Christ dying for our sins.”

“For having found this man pestilent,” says the orator, “and to all the Jews, through the world, a stirrer up of riots, and a leader of the separation of the Nazarenes, who even the temple attempted to profane, we both seized (him), and, according to our law, wished to judge.” The term *pestilent*, Felix may have despised as mere declamatory abuse; but when Paul was charged with creating Jewish riots, through the world, the governor might have been roused to attach greater importance to this case, and to take some credit to himself for condemning a man dangerous to the peace of the whole Roman empire.

The word “sect,” applied to the Christians, is now flung about as a term of reproach against those who may here find that they are in good company. But as the Greek word is *αἵρεσις*, usually anglicised into “heresy,” you may ask, “Why was not that adopted here?” Tertullus is made, by our translators, to mean a sect, or section, a separate party taken off from another body. This is, indeed, the signification of the original word; though heresy signifies, among us, false doctrine. Schism, by which *we* express separation, the sacred writers apply to a rent in the unity, by alienation of affections in a church, without separation. You may, perhaps, say, What a pity that those who have shown so much pride and bigotry, in the use of these words, had shown a little Greek, by adhering to their true sense, and not confused our minds by so many false meanings put upon words derived from that tongue! One reason of the confusion may be assigned; that ecclesiastical terms have come to us through the church of Rome, which inaccurately expressed in Latin what it derived from the Greeks.

Tertullus called the Christians Nazarenes, from Jesus of

Nazareth, and, by this term of reproach, Julian, the emperor, constantly designates believers; though it is often applied to such Jewish Christians as considered the Mosaic law still in force.

“But Lysias, the colonel, or tribune,” says Tertullus, “coming up, with much violence, led away (Paul) from our hands, ordering his accusers to come to thee, from whom thou wilt be able thyself, having examined, to know concerning all these things of which we accuse him. And the Jews also concurred, saying, That these things were so.” To Lysias, because he was not there to defend himself, is ascribed violence, which, however, was no more than was necessary to protect Paul against theirs, who, without judging according to law, were attempting to beat him to death. The proof, which they profess to be able to elicit, by examining the accusers, Paul afterwards shows, should have been furnished by witnesses. But all the art of the practised rhetorician produced no more than a flattering exordium, some well rounded and finely-sounding periods, to which Paul returned a complete answer.

II. THE APOSTLE'S DEFENCE. Ver. 10.

“But Paul replied,” the governor having nodded to him, to speak, “As I know thee, being for many years judge to this nation, I the more readily apologise for myself; since it is in thy power to know, that there are not more than twelve days from that in which I went up, about to worship in Jerusalem. And neither in the temple have they found me disputing with any one, or making a disturbance among the crowd, nor in the synagogues, nor through the city. Neither are they able to establish the things of which they accuse me. But I confess this to thee, that, according to the way which they call a separation, so I worship the paternal God, believing all things, which, through the law, and which, in the prophets, are written; and having hope towards God, which also these, themselves, expect, that there is about to be a resurrection, both of the just and unjust: but in this I exercise myself, to have an unwounded conscience towards God and towards man, continually.

“But, after many years, I came, about to administer alms to my nation and (to make) offerings; when certain Jews from

Asia found me sanctified in the temple, not with a crowd, nor with tumult ; who ought to have been before thee and to accuse (me), if they had anything against me. Or let these themselves say what fault they found in me, when I was standing in the Sanhedrim ; other than that one utterance, which I proclaimed, standing among them, that " concerning the resurrection of the dead, I am judged, this day, by you."

This reply to a vague, unproved charge, is so simple, so clear, so much composed of appeals to notorious facts, that it requires scarcely any comment. Yet you may observe that, full as the apostle's heart was of Christ and his salvation, and, ardently as he longed to proclaim the glad tidings for the salvation of men, the saving theme is here not mentioned. For as there is " a time to speak, so also to be silent, and everything is beautiful in its season." The Jews accused Paul of criminal conduct, at Jerusalem, merely glancing at his ministry, elsewhere ; and he strictly confines himself to a refutation. The introduction of irrelevant matter into a defence, is not only calculated to defeat the object, as it alienates the judge, by creating a suspicion that the accused is destitute of any proper answer ; but it is an offence against a court of justice, which ought not to be diverted from the question at issue, to try another cause. He, therefore, who, as an apostle, would " know nothing save Jesus Christ, and him crucified," when accused, as a criminal, knew nothing but the charge, and the evidence which he could adduce that it was false. Theology in the pulpit, and law in the king's bench.

The contrast between the exordium of Tertullus, the orator, and that of Paul, the defendant, is most striking. The accuser flatters the judge, as a benefactor, popular among the Jews, for which Felix must have despised him, knowing it to be false ; but the apostle commended himself, alike to the judgment and conscience of the governor, by simply expressing the fact, that the accused answered the more readily, because he knew Felix had presided so many years, some say seven, some say ten, over that nation, as to be able to judge aright. Felix had it in his power to know, that though the apostle had been about six days a prisoner, he had not been more than twelve in the country, having come up to Jerusalem in order to worship, which Felix knew to be the practice of the devout Jews ; and therefore might see how improbable it was that Paul should wish to pro-

fane the temple. There his enemies found him quiet, nor could they say he created any disturbance, in the synagogues, or the city, any more than in the temple. He defies them to prove their charge; but confesses that he pursued the way which they called a separation, using the same word which our translators rendered in the fifth verse, "*sect*," but here "*heresy*;" though it is highly desirable to keep, as far as possible, to one rendering of a word, especially to retain the same word in the defence, as in the charge. "In this way," says Paul, "I worship, or serve, the paternal God, or the God of our fathers, whom we have learned from them to adore. I know no other than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, our fathers' God; believing all things which, through the whole law, and in the prophets, are written." The religion of the Christians, being reared upon the basis of the professed faith of the Jews, cannot be true, if theirs is false.

Because Christians believe all things written in the Old Testament, the apostle had hope towards God, to whom nothing is impossible, "that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust," which the Jews themselves expect. Here Ananias must have been mortified, to find that Paul considered the doctrine of the Pharisees as the truth, and virtually pronounced the deniers of the resurrection as infidels. That the Old Testament contains no revelation of a future life is the assertion of an eccentric prelate, Warburton; but while the Gospel throws new light on life and immortality, which were *comparatively* hidden from the ancient church, our Lord confuted *by the law of Moses*, the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection. Paul here shows the candour and sincerity of his conduct, in the Sanhedrim, where he held the doctrine of the Pharisees to be the true Jewish faith. To awaken the conscience of Felix also, the apostle mentions the resurrection of the unjust as well as the just, and the effect which a sincere belief of this awful truth had upon himself, to preserve a tender, faithful, unaccusing conscience towards God and man. Such is the peculiarity, power, and glory of a good conscience, that it can scarcely be professed without giving evidence of its truth, and I doubt not but even the defiled conscience of Felix bore witness to Paul's superior bliss.

Having now confessed his faith, and shown that the way he

pursued, though called a separation, was no departure from the ancient Jewish religion, the apostle returns to meet the charge of profaning the temple. "After many years," of which Felix could judge, as he had been many in his government, and Paul had never before been arraigned at his bar, "I came"—for what?—"to bring alms to my nation and offerings," alluding to the contributions of the Gentile Christians, which he brought for the poor saints in Judea. This was sufficient proof that he was no enemy to those whom he calls "my nation," whose religion separated them from all the rest of the world, though its authorities were now persecuting and accusing him as a common foe. Paley has shown how many undesigned, but striking coincidences, there are between this mention of bringing alms, and the following passages in Paul's Epistles: Rom. xv. 25, 26 1 Cor. xvi. 1—4; 2 Cor. viii. 1—4, ix. 1—4. These coincidences are proofs of the truth both of the Acts and Epistles.

"Thus engaged, certain Jews from Asia found me, sanctified in the temple;" or pure according to its rites. There was no crowd or tumult, but what was raised by those whom, in all reason and equity, it was necessary to have produced before Felix. For the whole affair originated with Asiatic Jews; and the high priest, as well as all the senate now present, came into the business too late to be competent witnesses in the cause.

Yet, of mere grace, the apostle says, "Let these who are now present testify of what *they* know;" though this is not the original charge, but a part of the process of trial. "Let them say what fault they found in me, when I was standing in their court of the Sanhedrim. Was it any other than this one sentence which I published aloud, 'concerning the resurrection of the dead, I am judged by you this day'?" As the letter of Lysias mentioned the hearing in the Sanhedrim, Felix could easily see that this must be true; and as he knew the doctrine of the Jews concerning the resurrection, he could judge that this was no heresy, much less crime. No lawyer could read this defence without pronouncing it triumphant, and no Christian can study it, without learning to defend his faith, and his conduct, with all holy courage, and with all possible abstinence from bitterness and wrath; from recrimination and revenge. Thus our Lord fulfilled his promise to the persecuted apostles, "I will give you

a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries shall be able to resist."

III. THE VARIED CONSEQUENCES THAT FOLLOWED ON THE TRIAL.

These were, an unnecessary and unjust delay; a private interview along with Drusilla; many other conferences; and the recall of Felix, leaving Paul a prisoner.

1. *Delay.* Ver. 22. "For Felix deferred them, knowing more accurately what concerned that way;" which seems to indicate that he, understanding the Christian religion, which, through this book, is called the "way," and thus able to decide at once, could not resolve to gratify the Jewish rulers, by condemning Paul; though Felix had not sufficient virtue to pronounce him discharged as innocent. The reason of his sinning against his better knowledge appears, from what follows, to have been his venality; hoping that the chief priests, vexed at being put off, and alarmed lest Paul should escape, would buy his condemnation; as we find that he hoped Paul would buy his liberty; and Felix was the man to take bribes from both sides, and, perhaps, deceive both.

It seems a mere pretence to say, "When Lysias, the chiliarch, is come down, I will investigate your affairs." Lysias is not said to have come, nor is it probable that he, who had already given his testimony in his letter, was expected.

But Felix ordered the apostle to be kept by the centurion, and to have, not exactly liberty, as we read, but, as the Syriac and Luther say, "rest;" and to hinder none of his own party to serve him or to come to him. Thus God gave his servant release from all restraint, beyond what was necessary to secure his person, leaving him a prisoner at large. Now Philip, or his prophetic daughters, might come to him and serve him, while they see their predictions fulfilled, in Paul being delivered by the Jews to the Romans, and Paul's reply verified, "None of these things move me." A prisoner at large, in Herod's palace, at Cæsarea, was to be congratulated, compared with him that was in the dungeon at Philippi. But the delay of justice is great injustice, and, when this arises from venality in the judge, it brings upon him the vengeance denounced by the Supreme Judge.

It is well observed, that Felix saw Paul had friends, which induced him to order, for more than one reason, that they should not be prevented from visiting him. Happy they to whom Christ shall say, "I was in prison, and ye visited me." During this delay there followed—

2. *A private interview along with Drusilla.* Ver. 34. "But, after some days, Felix, being present with Drusilla, his wife, a Jewess, sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ." This, you will observe, is the first time that Christ is mentioned in this chapter, for, through the whole affair, the accusers durst not mention him; and, though Paul wished to make the resurrection introductory to that of Jesus, yet, being confined to his own defence, no opportunity occurred. But Drusilla, as a Jewess, was probably curious to hear what so celebrated a convert to Christ would say of the Messiah in whom he believed; and, to gratify her, Felix sent for Paul, and condescended to hear of the faith in Jesus.

From what is recorded, some would say, Paul preached not faith in Christ at all; for "he discoursed concerning righteousness, temperance, and the judgment that is coming." Being terrified, Felix answered, "For the present, go; and taking (another) opportunity, I will call for thee."

Paul had been taught by Him who said, "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." Our Lord promised that "the Spirit should come and convince the world of sin and righteousness." This he does in the preaching of the Gospel. Away, then, with that folly and falsehood; "preaching righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, is not preaching the Gospel." For when our aim is to convince men of sin, and show them their need of Christ, it is apostolic preaching. Felix showed too plainly that he, though a judge, needed to learn righteousness; and, as to temperance, this included, not merely what we call by that name, but also continence, chastity, and the kindred virtues, which he and Drusilla grossly violated; while the judgment that was coming opened to view the necessity for faith in Jesus, who alone "saves us from the wrath to come." Who that sees through the preacher, on the one hand, and the hearer, on the other, is surprised that Felix became terrified? For a moment, he that regarded not man, dreaded God descend-

ing to judge the judge. But, alas! instead of saying, "What must I do to be saved? How shall I escape the wrath to come?" he says, "Go, for the present." It is one thing to be terrified, another to be converted. The flames of hell never melt down the damned.

Infelicitous Felix! He had his temptress by his side; and, though Drusilla was a daughter of Abraham, according to the flesh, and had enjoyed instructions such as Felix never knew, we read not that *she* trembled. For she was a notorious adulteress; and the chastity which should be the woman's guard of honour, being flung to the winds, shame also, and, with it, every virtue is set at defiance. Drusilla was daughter of Herod Agrippa, whose miserable end we have seen, and the sister of that Agrippa before whom we shall shortly see Paul making his defence. Pronounced the most beautiful of women, she captivated Azizus, king of the Emesenes, whom, probably from pride, rather than principle, she refused to marry, till he, equally unprincipled, consented to become a Jew. But Felix, being also fascinated by her, induced her to desert her husband, and marry him who is said to have been husband to three queens. One of them is called, by Tacitus, Drusilla, grand-daughter of Antony and Cleopatra; but the name was, perhaps, at that time, common. Her arts would inevitably be employed to blunt the points of Paul's arrows, and the sinner, who is entangled in the net of a wicked woman, "goes like an ox to the slaughter, or a fool to the correction of the stocks." "Go, therefore," says Felix, "for the present. Go, Paul. Come, Drusilla; let us go."

3. *The unhappy termination of the whole.* Ver. 26. At the same time that the governor talks of finding an opportunity to send for the preacher again, he was "hoping that money would be given him by Paul." Money? For what? If he were guilty, no money should screen him whom justice claimed. If he were innocent, no money should be required of him; for life and liberty were his own. So *we* reason, who happily know nothing of money being given to a judge, to induce him to decide either way. But this inestimable advantage we, who think it so natural, owe, in some measure, to Judge Hale, whose history shows that, down to his time, our judges hoped that money would be given them; but he, by force of true religion, frowned upon the bribery that would blind the eyes to pervert judgment,

and originated a process of public opinion, which has not only covered these gifts to judges with shame, but has banished this infamy from our courts of law. To a female suitor, who sent him a present of fruit, he said, "Gentle Eve, I want none of your apples;" and, when dying, he told his children, "I could have left you rich; but though I leave you little, it was all honestly got, and will wear like steel." He left a better inheritance to his children than Felix to his; for, alas! his son, and Drusilla the mother, perished, if not by fire from heaven, in an eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

Felix, a slave, who had risen by favouritism to a subordinate throne, was one of *Æsop's* hungry flies, that fattened themselves by sucking the blood of the public; but when he sought money as the price of Paul's blood, he showed that he knew not how precious in God's sight is the blood of his saints. Was not that more convenient season which Felix sought, one more private, that would afford convenient opportunity for giving and receiving bribes? But though he understood more accurately the Christian way than to judge Paul guilty, like other shrewd, observant men of the world, he knew not the heart of a Christian, much less of an apostle, or he would have had no hope of money from Paul. Felix, judging from himself, concluded that the leader of a rising religious party, would take care to feather his own nest; and could never have suspected that apostles, who administered alms, should say, "Silver and gold have I none." But then, the corrupt judge would say, there are Paul's friends, at *Cæsarea*, and all over the world, who are rich enough to send alms, and will supply him with money to buy his liberty; for it would never occur to such a mind to ask, "Will Paul let them?" We know that he who would not go out of prison privately, when the magistrates sent to let him go, would not bribe the judge to let him off, however willing Felix was to sell. Paul would not betray his cause, for the sake of his liberty, nor leave the enemy to say, "though guilty, he escaped by bribery;" if Felix would have said, "But you can serve your cause more effectually by being set at liberty, than you can while my prisoner." "He that is spiritual judgeth all things, but he himself is judged of no man."

Sadly disappointed, therefore, was the governor, when, sending for the apostle more frequently than could have been expected,

after the fright about judgment to come, no hint was given of money forthcoming, nor any notice taken of the broad hints that money would settle the business at once. Who can be surprised that, though conversing with Paul, whose words were as a sharp two-edged sword, Felix trembled not again ?

See the end. Two years having been completed, Felix, without any happy change, received a successor to his government, in the person of Porcius Festus ; for the Jews, wearied out by oppression, had obtained the governor's recall, and because no present was made by Paul, the unjust judge makes a present of him to his enemies ; Felix, wishing to leave favours to the Jews, whom he had provoked by his crimes to accuse him at Rome, left Paul bound. The accusers followed him to the hazard of his life. But thus our Lord's words were fulfilled, for Festus was the man who was to send the apostle to bear witness to Christ at Rome, and therefore to him Paul must be left.

1. *See here the danger of stifling the convictions of conscience, by the love of money, or of sensual lusts.* Some who sit unconcerned may say, "Oh, if we heard Paul reason of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, we should feel and tremble !" Perhaps you might ; though that is not sure, for *you* are in the condition of Drusilla, brought up in the knowledge of true religion,—and did she tremble ? But it is then, when a Felix comes into our assemblies, never having heard such preaching before, that we see in the countenance how the heart trembles. But suppose Paul preached till you were terrified, what would be the consequence ? May not past experience say, it would only be, "Go thy way for the present, and when I have a more convenient season, I will send for thee" ? Have not some, who, many years ago, trembled, been saying this, for almost half a century ; till, at last, it has become a habit, and is uttered in a sleepy tone, that proves it has no meaning ?

Such is the consequence of stifling convictions, by the love of sin. For what means that more convenient season ? It is a mistake, a fallacy, a lie. There is, there can be, no season more convenient than the present ; the moment when sin and judgment, set home on the conscience, shake the soul. The next moment will be less favourable ; for the impression will be more faint ; and the love of sin will be more strong ; and the money or the lusts will be more dear, till the conscience, hardened like

iron by the repeated strokes of the hammer, will feel nothing but the horror of the voice that says, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee;" or, "Rise, ye dead, and come to judgment."

2. *See the glory of the Christian hope.* The first announcement of the rising dead must ever be as a thunder-clap. "Tell me," (I again remind you), said the blood-stained African warrior to the missionary Moffat, "did I understand you? or did my ears deceive me? Did you mean to say that the dead will rise again?" "Yes." "What! will all those men that I have killed, come to life again?" A body, stained with blood, polluted with obscenity, becomes horrible to the very mind that inhabits it. To rise in it, to be judged by the Infinitely Wise, the Infinitely Pure, the Infinitely Just, the Infinitely Mighty!

Thrice blessed the man who can believe, expect, and vividly anticipate, the rising of the dead, and the judgment of God, not only without turning pale, but with a "hope towards God," which can "light its torch at nature's funeral pile." For this is the effect of the "faith in Christ," which Paul preached. A Saviour, delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification; a Saviour, coming to judge the world in righteousness; changes these last gigantic scenes, from the terrible to the joyful, from all that repels the soul with horror to all that attracts it with hope. Since "every one that hath this hope in him purifies himself, as Christ is pure," their body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for their body, which, being the temple of the Holy Spirit, that Spirit which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us, like to his glorious body.

3. *The moral government of God shall close, as it began, this Lecture.* For who can have watched the trial of the apostle, without perceiving that our Creator has wrought into the constitution of our nature, and the condition of the world, proofs of his own rectoral character, and of our responsibility to his government? What proofs are here furnished of the essential distinction between truth and falsehood, innocence and guilt, and of the determination of God to show himself strong in behalf of the righteous! A rhetorician by profession is hired by government, to employ all the resources of his art to procure the condemnation of one whose life was a continued study to

maintain a conscience void of offence towards God and man. And what is the effect of the rhetorician's arts? A sonorous sentence of flattering falsehood to the judge, and unsupported calumnies against the accused.

The prisoner rises to make his own defence, which our law, deeming an unreasonable burden, permits the accused to entrust to the practised advocate of his own choice. But Paul, employing no flattery, commends himself to the conscience of the judge, by saying of him nothing but notorious truth. To incontrovertible facts he appeals, which find their response in every breast, and defies the accusers to the proof of their charge; showing that, while they had brought down their orator, they had left behind their witnesses, trusting to the eloquence of words, instead of the evidence of facts. In the confessions which he makes, he shows that they themselves unite; that he believed a resurrection of the dead, just and unjust; and who does not see that this was the theme to shake the soul of a judge from any wicked design to sacrifice an innocent prisoner to the great and mighty in the land? Who can read this whole process without exclaiming, "Great is the truth, and must prevail"? God has not left this disordered world without evidences of his moral government, and anticipations of that day when he shall sit upon the throne to judge the secrets of all hearts.

What evidences of the truth of our religion are furnished by the scene we have surveyed! "You shall be brought before governors and kings," said Christ to his apostles; "but calmly settle this in your hearts, that it shall turn to you for a testimony." A trial in court sifts evidence and elicits facts. Could the facts, which constitute the essence of Christianity, have stood this test, and triumphed over the persecution of the learned priest and the mighty ruler, if they had not been sufficiently proved, in the country, and the age, to which they belong? In Paul's defence, we have an epitome of that history which we have reviewed; and every new light in which it is placed, shows that "we have not followed cunningly devised fables," but that Luke, the historian, has accomplished what he promised at the commencement, that we "might know the certainty of the things wherein we have been instructed."

That which some would deem a fault in Paul's defence, is one of the striking evidences of the truth of Christianity, and a

triumphant answer to the most specious objection. For enemies have said, "We charge not the apostle with deceit and imposture, but give him credit for that sincerity which the sacrifice of his early prospects, and the lofty endurance of unparalleled sufferings, place beyond the reach of suspicion. But, then, he was a fanatic, mad upon one idea, that of Jesus and his salvation." How is it, then, we reply, that fanatics would blame him for not introducing this favourite idea into his defence? When the accusers mention not the name of Jesus, neither does the defendant. Is not this a proof that he was as rational as he was sincere?

If this twenty-seventh Lecture scarcely changes the scene, or the character of the occurrences presented to us, in the preceding, it is because Paul, who longed for the salvation of his countrymen, though quickly snatched from Jerusalem, where they would not receive his testimony, was long detained, by the authority of the Romans, in the seat of their government over Judea, that he might accomplish his mission, as apostle to the Gentiles.

LECTURE XXVIII.

PAUL'S APPEARANCE BEFORE FESTUS AND AGRIPPA.

ACTS xxv., xxvi.

As my hearers may be surprised, not to say alarmed, at my proposing to them two chapters for their consideration this morning, I must ask permission to remind them again, that the exposition of this book should be conducted according to its own peculiar nature, which is directly historical, and only indirectly doctrinal. As we, therefore, reckon our progress, not by verses, but by events, we shall, in reality, now take but one step of advancement in the history of the apostle. For the first of these chapters records an abortive attempt, at a trial before Festus, the new governor; and an introduction, to a hearing, though not a trial, before Agrippa. Of the latter, which occupies, indeed, the next chapter, more than the half consists of the narrative of Paul's conversion, which we pass over, as well known to us, though it was necessary to be told to those to whom it was new as it was striking. I divide the whole field, then, into two parts, the transactions with Festus, to the twelfth verse of the twenty-fifth chapter; and those in which Agrippa was concerned, to the end of the next.

I. THE TRANSACTIONS WITH FESTUS. To ver. 12.

These were, the insidious attempt of the Jews; the frustra-

tion of it by the governor; and the important step taken by Paul.

1. *The insidious attempt of the Jews.* Ver. 3. "Festus, therefore, having come into the province, after three days, ascended to Jerusalem from Cæsarea. But the high priest and the chiefs of the Jews informed against Paul, and entreated him, asking favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, making an ambush, to kill him on the road." To Cæsarea, as the political capital and the seat of government, Festus came first, probably landing there after his voyage from Rome; but having, in three days, introduced himself into office, he went up to the ancient metropolis and seat of the Jewish worship, the more promptly, perhaps, for the sake of the temple, which attracted travellers, as the wonder of the world. There the ecclesiastical authorities whose civil rule the Romans had almost entirely superseded; and Ananias, with the leading men of the nation, seized the opportunity to fill his mind with prejudices against Paul, asking, not justice, but favour against him, which probably defeated their own ends, by betraying to Festus their wicked design in entreating that he would send for the apostle to Jerusalem; or, if Lysias was still there, he would let out their guilty secret.

For their murderous plot was a clear proof that they could not stand a fair trial. Had they not been lost to conscience, to repentance, and to God, they would have seen and blessed his hand for already saving them from the guilt of innocent blood. When God prevents men from committing the sin they intended, he is "hedging up their path with thorns, that they may not find their way to perdition." Some have afterwards seen this, and adored God, as well for keeping them from what they have not, as for pardoning what they have done. But, woe to him who, having tried to sin and been prevented, tries again. By the part which the high priest took in this second plot, you may judge of his share in the first.

2. *The frustration of the plot by the governor.* Ver. 4—7.

"Festus then replied, that Paul was to be kept at Cæsarea, and that he himself was about shortly to set off. They, therefore, that are able among you, said he, going down too, if there is anything in this man, let them accuse him. And having spent among them, not more than eight or ten days, having gone

down to Cæsarea ; on the morrow, seated on the tribunal, he ordered Paul to be brought. But he being come, the Jews who had come down to Jerusalem, stood around, bringing many and heavy charges against Paul, which they were not able to demonstrate."

They were a second time mortified, in being ordered to go to Cæsarea, as accusers. But the promptitude with which Festus acted, in bringing on the trial, the day after their arrival, shows not only his fairness, but the importance which he attached to the cause. What were the many and heavy charges which the circle of accusers brought, we are not informed ; for into what they could not prove, Festus refused to enter. Theirs was the maxim, " Calumniate boldly, and something will stick ;" for Festus had not, like Felix, been many years their judge, so as to know both them and the Christian " way."

3. *The important step taken by Paul.* Ver. 8—12. " He, apologising (said), that neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Cæsar, have I at all sinned." This positive denial was sufficient against an unproved charge. " But Festus wishing, as a new governor, to grant a favour to the Jews, answering Paul, said, Art thou willing, going up to Jerusalem, there concerning these things to be judged by me ?" Festus, perhaps, thought that as the cause concerned the Jewish religion and temple, it might be best tried in their holy city ; but Paul approved neither the judges, nor the city, nor the journey ; and may have suspected that Festus was gained over by the priests, and that an ambush was still prepared. He, therefore, said, " At the tribunal of Cæsar, in Cæsarea, I am standing, where I ought to be judged ; at the seat of his government, and not at Jerusalem. The Jews have I not at all injured, as even thou pretty well knowest," which the apostle doubtless discovered. " For if, indeed, I am unjust, or have done anything worthy of death, I am not asking that I may not die. But if there is nothing in those things of which they accuse me, no one can give me up to them as a favour. To Cæsar I appeal. Then Festus, having spoken with the council, answered, To Cæsar thou hast appealed, to Cæsar thou shalt go."

Has not the apostle intimated here, that civil government has the power of life and death ; so that it is possible for one to

commit a crime worthy of death, and for which he ought not to refuse to die? But how could respect for law and rectitude be more emphatically proclaimed? Paul hints that Festus himself had no authority to give him up, to gratify the Jews; and all that remained to prevent this was, an appeal to Cæsar—a demand to be tried by the Emperor himself, who, since the days of Julius Cæsar, the first of that name, and the founder of the imperial monarchy, was called Cæsar, though the individual now reigning was Nero. As the Roman procurators, like our governors-general of India, were expected to consult the chief men, who formed a council, the appeal was admitted; though sometimes such appeals were overruled, that Cæsar might not be troubled with trifles. Pliny wrote to Trajan, “Those Christians that were Roman citizens I marked, to be sent to the imperial city.”

II. THE TRANSACTIONS IN WHICH AGRIPPA WAS CONCERNED. Ver. 12, to the end of chap. xxvi.

These were, such as introduced the hearing; the defence which Paul made for himself; the interruption by Festus; the appeal to Agrippa; and the termination of the whole.

1. *The introductory circumstances.* Ver. 13, to the end of chap. xxv. “But, after some days, Agrippa, the king, and Bernice, visited Cæsarea, saluting Festus. And as they spent many days there, Festus set before the king the things that concerned Paul; saying, A certain man is left by Felix, a prisoner, concerning whom, I being at Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders of the Jews laid information, asking judgment against him. To whom I said, that it is not a custom with the Romans to give up as a favour any man to destruction, before the accused face the accusers, and obtain an opportunity of defence concerning the accusation. They, therefore, being come together here, I, having made no delay, the next day, sitting on the tribunal, ordered the man to be brought, about whom the accusers, standing, brought no accusation of things which I suspected. But they had certain questions concerning their peculiar religion, and about a certain dead Jesus, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. But I, hesitating on a question of this kind, said, whether would he choose to go to Jerusalem, and there be judged concerning these things? But Paul, having appealed for him to be

kept to the examination of Augustus, I ordered him to be kept till I should send him to Cæsar."

The mention of a king, and his name Agrippa, give occasion to remind you that the history of the Jews at this era was exceedingly complicated. At Christ's birth you see one king, Herod, called the Great, reigning over the whole nation; but after his death the government was divided, and then his son Archelaus is said to have reigned over the principal division, termed by emphasis Judea; soon after which, it was reduced to a mere province, and we find Pontius Pilate the Roman governor. But even then we read of Herod the king being at Jerusalem; but this was only king of Galilee. Peter, however, was imprisoned by king Herod, who is also called Agrippa, a descendant of Herod the Great, the kingdom being restored to Judea; though when he was eaten up of worms, it became a province again; and we find Felix, and now his successor, Festus, Roman governors. The Agrippa, who came to pay his respects to the new governor, was the son of the last, and generally called Agrippa the Second, or the younger, king, not of Judea, but of Galilee. This is not a mere piece of history, for it furnishes an internal evidence of the truth of this book. For if it were an invention of later days, it could scarcely have escaped detection by some inaccuracy amidst such a complication of events. Lardner demonstrates the accuracy of Luke. Bernice is not called the wife of Agrippa, for she, as well as Drusilla, her sister, and Agrippa, were children of that Agrippa who died so miserably. She is said to have married Palesmo, king of Cilicia, to wipe off the reproach of an infamous connexion with her brother, to which, however, she returned. Where our translation uses the word superstition, I have given religion, for want of a better term. For the original Greek is employed in a good as well as bad sense; and is it probable that Festus would call superstition that which was the religion of the king whom he was now respectfully addressing? You will observe, also, that the Roman emperor is here called Augustus, from the immediate successor to Julius Cæsar; for after these two, Cæsar and Augustus became imperial titles. The manner in which Festus speaks of "a certain dead Jesus, whom Paul affirmed to live still," deserves notice. It has, in our translation, more of the air of contempt than is discernible in the original, or was,

perhaps, intended. Festus may have thought that Paul affirmed Jesus was living upon earth, but it is clear that more had been said about Jesus than from the narrative we should have supposed.

2. *Hear now the prisoner's defence.* "But Agrippa said to Festus, I have been wishing also myself to hear this man; and he said, To-morrow thou shalt hear him. On the morrow, therefore, Agrippa having come, and Bernice, with much display, they having entered into the hall of audience with the tribunes and the most eminent men of the city; and Festus having called, Paul was brought forth. And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all persons who are present with us, you see this (man), concerning whom all the multitude of the Jews dealt with me, at Jerusalem, and here, vociferating that it was not fit for him to live any longer. But I, conceiving he had done nothing worthy of death, and this person himself having appealed to Augustus, I determined to send him, concerning whom I have not anything certain to write to the sovereign. Wherefore I have brought him forth to you, and chiefly to thee, king Agrippa, that having investigated, I may have something to write. For it seems to me irrational, to indicate a prisoner sent, and not also the charges against him."

The good sense which Festus shows, inspires more respect than the pompous display made by the king and his sister. Some idea of their love of splendour may be derived from Juvenal. The governor's embarrassment reminds me that, on asking a special pleader whether he did not think Paul's defence before Felix triumphant, the reply was, "There was really no charge." Festus here says the same.

In our translation, he calls Cæsar "*my* lord," but the pronoun "*my*" is not in the original, and I was unwilling to render it literally "*the* lord," which with us means the Lord in heaven. For though the Romans called the emperor their lord and their god, which has since been applied to Popes, by paganized Christians, *Christian* emperors forbade this impious blasphemy. I adopt sovereign as equivalent to lord.

"But Agrippa said to Paul, It is permitted to thee to speak for thyself. Then Paul defended himself, stretching out his hand. Concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, King Agrippa, I deem myself happy in being about,

to-day, to defend myself to thee, as thou art peculiarly acquainted with all Jewish customs and questions, wherefore I entreat thee to hear me patiently. My life, then, from my youth, which was, from the beginning, in my nation, in Jerusalem, all the Jews know; being long previously acquainted with me, if they choose to testify, that according to the most exact section of our religion, I have lived a Pharisee. And, now, for the hope of the promise made to our fathers, by God, I stand judged, to which our twelve tribes, with intensity, night and day, worshipping, hope to attain; for which hope, O King, I am accused by Jews! Why? Is it judged incredible with you, if God raise the dead? I, indeed, thought with myself, against the name of Jesus of Nazareth, it was a duty to do many hostile things; which also I did, in Jerusalem; and many of the holy persons have I shut up in prisons, having received that authority from the chief priests; and when they were killed, I voted against them. And through all the synagogues, often punishing them, I compelled to blaspheme; and raging excessively against them, I persecuted even to cities beyond the (Holy Land). In which pursuits, going to Damascus, with authority and a commission that was from the chief priests, at mid-day, along the road, I saw, O King, from heaven, above the splendour of the sun, a light shining round me and those that were going with me. But we having fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me, and saying, in the Hebrew dialect, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goads. But I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise and stand upon thy feet. For this, verily, I am seen by thee, to select thee a minister and a witness, both of what thou hast seen, and of what I will appear to thee for; delivering thee from the people, and from the nations, to whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, to turn from darkness to light, and the power of Satan to God; for them to receive remission of sins, and a lot among the sanctified by the faith that is in me. Whence, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision; but to those in Damascus first, and in Jerusalem, and to all the country of Judea, and to the nations I announced, to repent, and to turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance. On these accounts, the Jews having seized me in the temple,

attempted to despatch me. Having, therefore, obtained help which is from God, to this day, I stand, testifying, both to small and great, saying nothing beside what both the prophets said were about to happen, and Moses (also); if (it is) that Messiah, a sufferer; if, first from a resurrection of the dead, he is about to announce light to the people and to the nations."

There are some circumstances, apart from the narrative of Paul's conversion, which demand attention. Observe, then, that this is not properly a defence in a trial on a charge; for Agrippa was not Paul's judge; and Festus, who was, considered the case as closed against his further interference, by the appeal to Cæsar. But a reasonable solicitude to be able to send, with the prisoner, a specific accusation, having induced the governor to mention the affair to his royal guest, Agrippa's wish to hear the apostle was now gratified. Paul, therefore, being at full liberty, takes his own course, and tells the wondrous tale, so fitted to benefit his audience and honour his Lord, interspersing no other allusions to his own defence than the narrative naturally suggests.

This was a most important and auspicious moment, when both Jews and Gentiles might, in the persons of their rulers, receive the testimony of the Gospel. To the Christians also, it was a crisis; for a new governor, coming into the country, learned how to view "this section that was everywhere spoken against;" so that he seems to have restrained the fury of the Jews, and thrown the Roman shield over the Christians.

But as Agrippa was *the* person addressed, you see how the apostle, in whose defence before Felix and Festus is not recorded the name of Jesus, of whom they knew nothing,—now that he had obtained fit audience, poured forth all his heart, full of the glory of Christ, and the wonders of his grace in the conversion of the chief of sinners. For, the complimentary address to the king, which forms the exordium to Paul's speech, was equally a logical argument; and while Agrippa was propitiated, Festus must have been convinced that Paul deemed himself in possession of "truth, which dreads nothing but concealment." For Jesus and his religion, which were kept back when there were none capable of judging, now burst in full glory before a Jewish king, well-informed on all subjects connected with the Scriptures of Moses and the prophets.

Paul's appeal to the Jews' knowledge of him as a young

Pharisee, was calculated to show that he was not one of those reckless, renegade Jews, who then abounded; but a man of deep religious principle. For the hope of a resurrection, as promised to the fathers, was a part of his ancient faith, as well as the grand theme of his present ministry. The mention of the twelve tribes, serving God night and day, in hope of attaining this resurrection, opens a wider field for discussion than we can occupy. Mr. George Bennet, of Carlisle, the able writer of an English work, with a Hebrew title, עולם הנשמות, or, The World of Souls, contends, that, as the Jews were not then a twelve-tribe nation, and as the apostle describes their worship in so lofty terms, he must refer to the departed spirits of the faithful Jews, who, from all the tribes, through all ages, entered the Paradise of God; and in the temple, where they worship night and day, were waiting in hope of coming to the resurrection of the body,—a consummation for which the spirits of the pious dead look and long. This extraordinary writer, whose book ought to be better known, who has so thoroughly sifted the doctrine of the separate state, and discovered so many unnoticed Scriptural evidences, I am unable, perhaps unwilling, to contradict. Still, I cannot but think, that, if the apostle had intended to appeal to the world beyond the grave, he would have made this more clear; while the strain of his argument, here and elsewhere, was, to show that the doctrine of a resurrection was the faith of his nation. If so, he must have alluded to the remnants of the twelve tribes, who, whether returned from their dispersion, or, as James says, scattered abroad, still worshipped the God of their fathers, in hope of the resurrection.

But as the Sadducean scepticism had widely prevailed, and the Pharisees joined in denying Christ's resurrection, Paul says, "For this hope I am accused by Jews." Viewing a large part of his audience as real unbelievers, he grows animated, and asks, "Why?" If God raise the dead, is this judged among you, incredible? Cannot God do this, if he please? He who gave us life at first, can surely restore it to us, even from the bosom of the grave. Turning to the resurrection of Christ, the apostle declares, that, though once persuaded he ought to oppose him, and, fearfully acting on that conviction, not as a violent rioter, but as an agent commissioned by the authorities of his nation,

he had been subdued, and transformed into a Christian and an apostle, by that very Jesus whom the king knew to have been put to death. All the circumstances of his former life, which the apostle mentions, were notorious facts that could not be contradicted.

But now we turn to those which followed his conversion. Far from disbelieving, as Luther and others translate, or, disobeying, as our version says, the heavenly vision; the apostle openly declares to what an extent he fulfilled his commission, commencing at Damascus, to which he had been sent, and returning to Jerusalem, whence he had gone, to persecute; and through all the country, and to the nations at large, he had announced—what?—nothing contrary to the good of society, or the real religion of the Jews; but that men should repent, and act accordingly. Yet it was for this the Jews seized him in the temple, and attempted to despatch him; the only crime with which he charges them, though they had committed many others against him. To God he ascribes his preservation to that day, and owns that he spent his life in testifying to the inferior classes, or to the great, like those whom he now addressed, nothing but what the Scriptures foretold. Our version takes the Greek *ει*, as equivalent to *ετι*; but I take it in its more ordinary sense, “*if*.” The apostle says, “If this is what seems strange, that the Messiah should be a sufferer, and rise as the first from the dead, and then should show light to the people of the Jews, and to the other nations.” *If* all this *was* strange to the Jews, it was not the less accordant with the Scriptures of truth.

3. *The interruption occasioned by Festus.* Ver. 24—27. “But he, uttering these things as his apology, or defence, Festus, with a loud voice, said, Thou art mad, Paul: much learning drives thee to madness. But he said, I am not mad, mighty Festus; but words of truth and sound reason I utter. For the king knows about these things, to whom with freedom I speak; for I am persuaded that none of them are hidden from him, for it is not in a corner that this is done.”

That mixture of motives which so frequently operates, seems to have impelled Festus to interrupt a narrative which we could have wished to listen to much longer. His conscience was probably waked to eternal things; while the novelty and strangeness of the occurrences unfolded, gave him occasion to charge

the speaker with insanity. Festus was not, however, quite so rude as might be supposed; for the ancients were familiar with the idea of madness, inspired by Apollo, whose priestess, at Delphi, delivered her oracles in a mad fury; and Plato says, "Madness, inspired by God, is more beautiful than the sanity of ordinary men." Festus calls this a learned madness, the fruit of letters, as his own word expresses, alluding to Paul's mention of the prophetic writings. Most appropriate, cool, and respectful is the answer, denying the charge, and asserting the opposite, in language which better indicates its truth than our word *soberness*, which might be supposed to repel a charge of drunkenness; while the original expresses, not only the truth of the facts, but the soundness of the speaker's mind. As Festus might be excused on the ground of ignorance, the apostle appeals to the Jewish king, who knew the whole affair, since it was no secret hidden in a corner. Hear, then,

4. *The appeal to Agrippa.* Ver. 27—29. This, which our translation renders, first in the interrogative form, I am inclined to think was uttered more respectfully in the affirmative. "Thou believest, King Agrippa, in the prophets. I know that thou believest." "But Agrippa said to Paul, In a little thou persuadest me to become a Christian. But Paul said, I would pray to God, both in a little and in much (time), not only for thee, but also all that hear me to-day, to become such as I also am, excepting these bonds."

The rendering of this passage is much disputed; and it is not without vacillation, and some uncertainty, that I have decided in favour of that which I have given. *Time* is sometimes the word implied in this elliptic idiom, "a little longer, and you persuade me to become a Christian;" which may be a reason for the interruption, that the apostle might not have time to complete his work. Our phrase, "I would to God," is an awkward imitation of the French, *plût à Dieu*; for we do not say, "may it please to God." I think the apostle expresses, not a mere wish, but what he could earnestly pray to God for. Nor can I reconcile myself to the thought that Paul wished his hearers should be almost Christians, and, also, altogether such, which is a contradiction. Did he not rather say, that he could pray to God, both for a little while, and for a long time, that they might be such as he was?

But when the apostle, who, to keep him safely for the hearing of Cæsar, had been chained to the soldiers, is seen holding up his chains, saying, "I could pray that you might all be like me, excepting only these chains," who is not struck with the eloquence of his action, and the benevolence of his heart? It was too much for his audience; and they broke away from the scene which they could no longer endure. Think you see and hear him, to-day, and join him in prayer to God, that you may be such as he was, excepting only his bonds; aye, or even if they were not excepted; for no chain of gold is so precious and honourable as those bonds for Christ.

5. *The termination of the whole process.* Ver. 30, to the end. "The king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and those that were sitting with them, and, having withdrawn, they spake with each other, saying, that nothing worthy of death or of bonds is this man practising. But Agrippa said to Festus, This man could be liberated, except that he appealed to Cæsar."

If we may judge from the order of the words, Agrippa rose first; being, perhaps, most affected by the appeal, of the truth and force of which he was best able to judge. Festus followed, as he called the assembly for the sake of knowing the opinion of the Jewish king, who was now withdrawing. Bernice may have moved last, either in deference to the rulers, or as, like her adulterous sister, most callous to all that was holy and divine. The military officers, and other eminent persons of the city, seem to have been assessors; so that Cæsarea and the army must have heard of this most interesting scene, calculated to lead them to the salvation of Christ. But, alas, we read of no such result.

The appeal to Cæsar, which seems to have prevented Paul's deliverance from imprisonment, now demands our attention. A modern class of religionists condemns all appeals to human laws, and forbids Christians to take any part in civil government. The New Testament, indeed, enjoins "*brother* not to go to law with brother, before the unjust; but to set even those who are least esteemed in the church to settle disputes, and if any will not hear the church, he is to be regarded as a heathen." Paul and Silas, however, claim their rights, at Philippi, and the magistrates, who had unlawfully beaten and imprisoned them, come and fetch the prisoners out. Paul pleaded his right, as a Roman citizen, to be

exempt from torture, uncondemned. That he might not be given up, to gratify the Jews, he appealed to Cæsar. If some think themselves wise enough to condemn the apostle, as doing wrong ; we think it wiser to justify the apostle, who declared that civil government was an " ordinance of God for the punishment of evil-doers, and the praise of them that do well." To take a part in an ordinance of God, and avail ourselves of it for the very purposes for which it was instituted, may, by circumstances, become a duty, and cannot be in itself a sin.

The appeal to Cæsar removed a cause from a prejudiced court, and an ignorant, excited, or bribed judge, to a tribunal remote from these influences, and to a locality where every advantage for a just decision might be obtained. But it is said, it was this which kept Paul a prisoner. Who can be sure of that? We are not to judge by events, but by principles. Otherwise, what shall we say of Christians who, with their Lord, have been hated of all men, and persecuted unto death? Paul might have been slain by the ambush of the Jews, if he had not appealed to Cæsar. Other causes might have detained him a prisoner, if this had not. And who can read this last narrative, and think it a calamity that the appeal brought him before Agrippa? Some may plead that Christ's promise of Paul's bearing witness to him at Rome induced the appeal; but God's purposes are not our rule of action, though the knowledge of this may have encouraged Paul to that which, on other grounds, he deemed right. The appeal brought him at last to Rome, whence he wrote some of his most important Epistles. Was this a calamity to be deplored?

Our second reflection is suggested by the apostle's narrative of his conversion, which we formerly considered in itself, but here must view in connexion with its consequences. Happy the man who, on relating his conversion to the faith of Christ, can give this appendix: "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but obeyed the high command; spent my life bearing witness to Christ, seeking to bless others with the knowledge imparted to me; and having, amidst perils and toils, obtained help from God, I continue to this day testifying no other things than the Scriptures say."

This is the decisive proof that the change we narrate was genuine—its effects in producing all holy obedience through a life of trial and of labour—its effects up to the present day. To

tell of an experience which, "like the baseless fabric of a dream, left not a wreck behind," is to repeat what the prophet says of a hungry man that dreams of eating, but wakes and is famished. That conversion which does nothing is nothing. The apostle's change of conduct is made the proof his change of heart. That new and divine life, which is imparted in regeneration, never dies, never sleeps, never lies idle, never proves unprofitable; but operates "to open the eyes of others, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the dominion of Satan to God." To this day, the divine help must be experienced, or in vain we appeal to what occurred, yesterday, or the day before.

Finally, behold the close of that visit to Judea, on which the apostle's heart was set, in defiance of all warnings of persecution and bonds, or even death. The curtain now drops upon the Holy Land. Henceforth, we know it no more. Shall I repeat that the New Testament abandons the sad story of Judea's fates to profane historians—Josephus, the Jew, or Tacitus, the Roman? Perhaps I should send you, not to history, but to prophecy. But, ah! how sad the reference! For then we behold Him who "saw the end from the beginning," amidst tears of compassion, telling all that lies beyond this chapter of the Acts,—“the house left desolate, the enemy compassing it around, leaving not one stone upon another, and slaying the children within, because they knew not the day of their visitation.” Let history say how justice fulfilled what incarnate mercy foretold. Or go, visit the land, and behold the desolation. Governors and kings assembled to hear the last testimony of Saul, whom the Jews chose as their grand Inquisitor, to blot out the name of Christ, but whom he chose as his grand witness and apostle; and, justifying him, the judges condemned the accusers. He goes far hence to the Gentiles, and they are left to— Who can bear to tell?

The last public testimony to Christ, borne by the apostle before governors and kings, being recorded in the twenty-eighth Lecture, we are reminded that the history is drawing to a close.

LECTURE XXIX.

PAUL'S VOYAGE AND SHIPWRECK.

ACTS xxvii.

“THEY that go down to the sea in ships see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep.” This morning we behold the wonders of the Lord, not only in his command over the stormy ocean, but also in his care over the precious treasure which it wafted on its bosom, a chosen vessel of Christ, to bear his name to the Gentiles at Rome, which was their head. Though the angry sea seemed to fling an apostle as a worthless wreck upon its shores, the “stormy wind fulfilled his word,” who gave to Paul the lives of all that sailed with him; for thus the chapter of storms closes, “they escaped all safe to land.” The opening of the narrative records the more calm part of the voyage, to verse 13; the middle describes the stormy scene, verse 26; and the end relates the shipwreck.

I. THE CALM. Ver. 13.

This portion of the chapter we may divide into

1. *The nautical*; where all seemed prosperous and confident. “But as it was determined for us to sail off to Italy, they delivered both Paul and certain other prisoners to a centurion, named Julius, of the band of Augustus. But, going on board an Adramyttian vessel, we, being about to navigate those parts

that lie along Asia, set sail, Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us."

As, from Palestine to Rome, would have been, by land, a long and fatiguing journey, the conquest of Judea was thus foretold, "*Ships* shall come from Chittim (Italy), to afflict Eber." The intercourse between the conquering Romans and the vanquished Jews was maintained by sea. Paul was, therefore, sent by ship to Cæsar, along with other prisoners, some of them, perhaps, criminals, that he, like his Lord, might "be numbered with the transgressors." He had friends, too, not only Luke, but one of his beloved Thessalonians; Aristarchus having, probably, chosen to sail with him, for his consolation. Lightfoot thinks that Trophimus, the Ephesian, whom the Jews had seen with the apostle in Jerusalem, sailed with him; but falling sick, was put on shore and left at Miletus.* The vessel belonged to a sea-port of Myra, in Asia Minor, still called Adramit, and distinguished for ship-building.†

"On the next day, we were borne down to Sidon; and Julius philanthropically treating Paul, permitted him, going to his friends, to obtain their care." A timid running from one port to the next we shall see, through the whole voyage. Without the mariner's compass, they made short trips—afraid to lose sight of shore. The centurion, who may have been a relative, or a freed-man, of the celebrated Julius, the first of the Cæsars, commanded a band, or cohort, named after the second of them, Augustus; and was a philanthropist, at least to Paul, whose defence he may, with the other military officers, have heard at Cæsarea, and admired. God, who gave Joseph and Daniel favour in the eyes of those who carried them captives, thus raised up one friend, who allowed Paul to go on shore and receive the kindness of others; for which he who rewards every service done for him, or his friends, gave to Paul the life of Julius, as well as of "the rest who sailed with him."

"And thence being borne, we sailed under, or to the south of, Cyprus, on account of the winds being contrary," when they would otherwise have taken them to the north, along the Asiatic coast. "Then, having crossed the sea that lies along Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came down to Myra of Lycia; and there the centurion, having found an Alexandrian ship sailing

* 2 Timothy iv. 20.

† Xenophon, Anab., lib. vi., 331.

into Italy, put us on board it." Myra being under the same meridian as Alexandria, the ships of this beautiful port formed by the Macedonian conqueror, in conveying corn from Egypt, which was the granary of Rome, ran directly for Myra. The Alexandrian ships, the largest in those seas, were best fitted for the numerous passengers whom Julius had in charge.

"But, sailing slowly, a good many days, and scarcely being come along Cnidus, the wind not permitting us, we sailed under Crete, along Salmone, and scarcely making it, we came to a certain place called the 'Fair Havens,' near to which was the city Lasæa." Cnidus, celebrated for a statue of Venus by Praxiteles, was on a peninsula of the same name, opposite Rhodes, but the wind, which scarcely allowed them to reach it, now bore them away from the continent, to the east end, and south side, of Crete, the last of the Greek islands. Doubling the cape, or promontory, which was anciently deemed a critical affair, brought them to a place still called Kalas Limenas, "fair havens," near Lasæa, probably one of the hundred cities for which Crete, that may be called Long Island, being 170 miles in length, was celebrated by Homer.

After the purely nautical, we come to

2. *The apostolical* (ver. 9) *part of the narrative, which relates the slight put upon Paul.* "But a good while being spent, and navigation being already dangerous; because the fast was now gone by, Paul exhorted, saying to them, Sirs, I perceive, that with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives, this voyage is about to be. But the centurion trusted rather to the governor and the supercargo, than to the things spoken by Paul. And the port being dangerous for wintering, the greater part gave counsel to sail thence also, if, perhaps, they might be able to reach Phœnice, to winter, a port of Crete, looking along the south-west and north-west. And a south wind blowing gently, thinking to have obtained their purpose, having weighed anchor, they sailed close along Crete."

He whom we shall shortly see interposing as an apostle, under special divine guidance, here steps forward as a man of experience, who, having suffered shipwreck, and been a night and a day in the deep, was qualified to advise. For the fast appointed on the tenth of Tizri, the great day of atonement, about the

month of October, which the Jews still call the black fast, was gone by; and the equinoctial gales were dreaded in those seas, especially in the month of November, which some think had arrived, in consequence of the voyage having consumed much more time than they expected. The apostle's *theory*, to allude to the original word, was, that they would all be lost. The centurion, not indifferent to the advice, yet trusted less to the apostle, as fit for the pulpit rather than the helm, and more, not only to the governor, whom we should call captain, or rather pilot, (for several of these persons were taken on a voyage, for the sake of their nautical information,) but also to the owner, not merely of the ship, but of its freight, whom we should call the supercargo, were this our term for the *owner* of the freight. The majority advised to leave a port not favourable for wintering, and to sail fifty-two miles further, to Phœnice, a name that reminds us of Phœnicia, on the north coast of Palestine, both being derived from phoenix, or a palm-tree. This port of Crete, seems to have been double, a promontory dividing it; so that one side looked to the south-west, and the other to the north-west. We must now see how the fair hope they had of obtaining their object was blasted. For, instead of being laid up in port all the winter, as they intended, according to the custom of the ancients, they never reached the better harbour.

II. THE STORM. Ver. 14—26.

We have now another contrast between the nautical and the apostolical part of our narrative.

1. *The nautical* was all perilous and desperate.—Ver. 20. “But, not long after, a typhonic wind, called Euroclydon, struck against her; and the vessel, being seized, and not being able to keep to the eye of the wind, we, giving up, were drifted. And running under a certain island, called Claudia, we were scarcely able to become masters of the skiff, which, having heaved up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and fearing lest they should fall on the Syrtis, or quicksand, having lowered the tackling, so they were driven. But we, being fiercely tossed by the storm, on the following day, they made a discharge (of the lading); and, on the third, with our own hands, we flung out the furniture of the ship; and, neither sun nor stars

appearing for many days, and no small tempest pressing, at last, all hope of our being saved was taken away."

The wind was called by names which signified a swell, and especially an eastern wave; as we now hear of a *levanter*, and a *tuffoon*, in those seas. They were borne south of a little island below Crete, and the last European land towards Africa. Their boat, which they kept afloat, to be ready for landing at every port, they with difficulty reached, and took on board, as our ships do at the beginning of a voyage. If the *helps* mean something distinct from what follows, they are thought to be boards fastened across the deck, to strengthen it; while the undergirding was by means of cables, passed all round the vessel, to keep her together. The Syrtis, probably what was called the *major*, was a dreadful quicksand on the African coast, like our Goodwin Sands; for, as they knew not their exact course, they feared what was yet at a distance. The cargo they first threw overboard, and next, such parts of the apparatus of the vessel as were heaviest. The sun not being seen for many days, nor the stars at night, they, who were accustomed to be guided by these, where we trust to the compass, despaired, at last, of escape. Thus desperate were their nautical affairs.

2. But the *apostolical* portion of the story is full of confidence and hope: ver. 21—26. "But being much in need of food, Paul then standing in the midst of them, said, O Sirs, it had, indeed, been proper to have yielded to me, not to have sailed again from Crete, and not to have received this injury and loss. And now I exhort to take heart; for loss of life there shall be none of any of you; but of the vessel. For, there stood by me, this night, an angel of the God whose I am, and whom I worship, saying, Be not afraid, Paul, for to Cæsar it is necessary for thee to be presented; and, behold, God has granted thee, as a favour, all those who are sailing with thee. Wherefore, cheer up, Sirs, for, I trust to God, that so it shall be, in the manner that was told to me. But, on a certain island we must fall."

Though the storm at first took away all thought or inclination for food, after many days without any regular meal, they felt the want of sustenance; and, amidst the fainting crowd, Paul stood forth, like the angel which had appeared to him. He gently reminded

them, that they were brought into their present damaged state, by refusing to take his advice to remain at the fair havens in Crete. But this was not so much taking credit to himself, or aggravating their grief by reproaches, as preparing them to receive consolation, by giving more heed to what he had now to tell. "Come, cheer up; for loss of life there shall be none, though the ship shall be lost; but all that a man hath will he give for his life." Who can adequately conceive the sublime position in which the apostle must have appeared, when he said, "There stood by me, this night, an angel of the God whose I am, and whom I worship, saying, Be not afraid, Paul"? Oh, the bliss of the man who, when others saw nothing in the night but the white spray dashing over them, and the gulf yawning to receive them, saw an angel of God riding on the whirlwind, to come to his aid; and, when others heard only dismal howlings of the elements, and creaking of the labouring vessel, portending each moment their foundering in the deep gulf, heard the music of an angel's voice, forbidding fear, and assuring him that he must again stand on firm ground, at Rome, before Cæsar's face! But what angel's voice could be sweeter than that of the apostle, to those who heard him repeat the angelic message: "God has granted, as a favour to thee, all those who are sailing with thee. Since thou hast been precious in my sight, I will give men for thee"? Oh, the delicious sensations of the benevolent heart that could utter this to almost three hundred terrified creatures, who were looking for nothing but death! Julius, thou hast received the reward of thy philanthropy to Paul; for God has granted thee life for his sake. Astonished, as well as delighted, they might think it too good to be true; but he says, "Cheer up; for I trust to the God whose I am, that it shall be just as I was told." Such confidence inspires kindred confidence in others. If they must be cast on a certain island, this would appear to them a haven, compared with the wide raging sea around, and the gulf beneath. He can afford to expect a shipwreck, who can say, "I believe the God who told me, also, that he gave me, not only my own safety, but that of all around me. Such is the glory of saying, 'I am the Lord's;,' him I worship. He whose property in me I confess, adoring, will take care of his own, who may be wrecked, but cannot be lost." Come, then, see

III. THE SHIPWRECK. Ver. 27 to the end of the chapter.

Here a welcome gleam of the fulfilment of Paul's prediction, is overcast by an insidious attempt, but followed by a triumphant close.

1. *An opening prospect of the predicted deliverance.* Ver. 27. "But when it was the fourteenth night of our being driven about in Adria, in the middle of the night, the sailors suspected they were approaching some land; and having sounded, they found twenty fathoms; and having waited a little, and sounded again, they found fifteen fathoms; and, fearing lest we should fall into rough places, they cast from the stern four anchors, and wished for day to come."

I have retained the somewhat obscure word "Adria;" for by its meaning we must decide whether they were cast on Malta, or not. The Adriatic Sea, *as now understood*, being also called the Gulf of Venice, would show that the island on which they were wrecked must have been a small one, called Meleda. But it is contended by the best scholars that the ancient geographers gave the name of Adriatic to the whole sea extending from Crete to the African and Sicilian coast, which proves that the apostle was cast away on the island of Malta, according to ancient tradition.

Fourteen days spent in such a voyage was, at least, five times as long as they expected. But now come signs of deliverance; for God has mercifully granted to the sailor tokens of approaching land, which he well understands. They began to find the sea discoloured, by having washed chalk cliffs or lime-stone rocks, bearing with it sea-weeds, or fragments thrown from the shore; while the sea-gulls, that hover round the land, were, if not seen, yet heard in the darkness of the night. As, however, not only deliverance, but danger too, attends the approach to land, the sailors sound by throwing the lead, and find there was only a depth of twenty fathoms, as we speak, though the original word means the length of the human arms fully stretched out. After waiting a little, they found five less, which proved they were on a rising shore.

That they should have thrown anchors out of the stern seems to us strange, as ours are cast from the head of the vessel; but in this, and the numerous anchors they carried, our naval tactics differ from those of the ancients. Dreading rough rocks, where they would be dashed to pieces, after attempting to retain the

ship in its present place, they wished the day to dawn, that they might see where they were, and what to do.

2. *The attempt of the sailors to leave the vessel.* Ver. 30. "The sailors, seeking to escape from the ship, and having lowered the skiff into the sea, on pretence as if they were going to carry out anchors from the prow, or head, of the vessel; Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, Except these remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes from the skiff, and let her fall off."

At the selfish conduct of these heathen sailors we do not wonder; but naval men of high character deem it their duty to take care of their passengers, to save defenceless females first, and to be themselves the last to quit the vessel, as they know best how to meet the utmost extremity of danger. For this they often deserve the highest praise. When the pretence to carry out anchors to steady the head, as they had already four from the stern of the vessel, was opposed by Paul, some wonder at his words, "Except the sailors remain with the vessel, *you* soldiers cannot be saved." For did not the angel promise, and Paul believe, that not only he, but all that sailed with him, should escape with life? Could the sailors' treachery frustrate the counsel of God? Certainly not; and it did not. But Paul's language was wisely calculated, and is kindly recorded, to teach us how to improve the promises of God, and the discovery of his decrees. Some may suppose that Paul was informed *how* they were to be saved, that it was by the sailors; but as this is a conjectural creation of our own, so it does not meet the difficulty; for still it could be said, Then he might silently have left this assurance to be fulfilled. But the true solution is this: God's decrees are not the rule of our conduct. As long as they are *mere* decrees or purposes of his mind, they cannot be our rule, for we do not know them; but even when they are revealed, and are no longer mere decrees, but assurances, they are not our rule of action; for they are still but declarations of what God will do; and, surely, this is not identical with what we ought to do. His precepts, therefore, are our only rule. Whatever God may have revealed of his intentions concerning the event, we are still left to follow the regular path of duty; as much as if we had known nothing of his designs. These are his rule of action, not ours. Paul, there-

fore, acted as a prudent man, taking care of his own life, and of his fellow-passengers, not the less because God had promised deliverance; the due effect of which would be cheerful confidence in the discharge of duty, but not fanatical negligence.

The centurion and the soldiers had learned so much of Paul's wisdom, and their obligation to hearken to his counsel, that they took care to keep the sailors in the ship, which they alone knew how to manage.

Another advice, important to their safety, the apostle gave. "For while the day was coming, Paul exhorted all to take food, saying, Expecting to-day, as the fourteenth, the crisis of the storm, you keep fasting, taking nothing; wherefore, I entreat you to take food, for this is for your safety; for of no one of you shall a hair of the head perish. But having said this, and taken bread, he gave thanks to God before them all, and having broken, he began to eat; and all becoming cheerful, they also themselves took food."

Most commentators, however, think the apostle speaks in absolute terms of taking nothing regularly for fourteen days, though they may have snatched an occasional morsel. It is, indeed, certain that we are not to suppose this ship's company passed fourteen days of any other fast than that which was the opposite of what Paul now advised, which was, to have a meal so regular and abundant as to recover them from their weakness, and make them fit to buffet with the waves and reach the shore. His exhortation he confirmed by his example; and who does not see the sacred dignity of the apostle in taking the bread, looking up to the God who rules the sea as well as the dry land, and instead of murmurings and complaints, giving him thanks for "the bread that strengthens man's heart" to meet danger and save life? Who can be surprised at the effect on all around, to cheer up their minds, and revive their care for their sinking frames, when they heard, not a hair of their heads should perish? Often has one Christian in a shipwreck astonished, delighted, and saved those that sailed with him. But too often, a meal taken in such a crisis men swallow like brutes, without thankful acknowledgments to the God who gave it, and gave them power to eat it, and gave it power to "strengthen man's heart."

3. *The fulfilment of the promise of escape.* Ver. 37. "And

we were in all two hundred and seventy-six souls in the ship ; and, being satisfied with food, they lightened the ship, casting out the freight, which was corn, into the sea. And when it was day, they knew not the land, but perceived a certain bay, having a beach, on which they designed, if they were able, to run the ship ; and, raising the anchors, they left her to the sea, at the same time loosing the lashings of the helm, and hoisting the mainsail to the breeze, they bore down upon the beach, and veering round into a place of two seas, they ran the ship ashore ; and the head, having stuck fast, remained immoveable, but the stern was dashed to pieces by the violence of the waves.

“But the soldiers’ counsel was, that they should kill the prisoners, lest any one, swimming off, should escape. But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, hindered them from accomplishing their design, and commanded those who were able to swim, having flung themselves off first, to get to land ; and the rest, these on broken boards, and those on some of the things from the ship ; and so it happened, that they all escaped to land.”

The advice to kill the prisoners, for whom the guards were responsible, betrays more forethought for themselves, than recollection of their obligations to Paul. But, again, Julius is the philanthropist ; and, again, the passengers owe their lives to Paul. The swimmers, escaping first, could assist those who could not swim. By learning this easy art we may save ourselves and others. Why should we sink like lead, when we may swim like a fish ? Two hundred and seventy-six souls all came safe to land ; for God had promised.

But to the infidel, who scornfully cries, Is this your apostle, tossed on the ocean, wrecked on the shore, and escaping all dripping wet ? Is this all that your Saviour does for him ? We answer, Never did our Lord promise that his disciples, or even apostles, should know no storms, suffer no shipwreck. Some may foolishly have promised themselves exemption from such calamities, because they went on his service ; but on them be the blame of the disappointment. A late venerable father of the missionary society went on board the “Duff,” where the first missionaries to the South Seas were embarked ; and in a farewell address, said to them, “Some may flatter themselves with the

assurance of fair winds and smooth seas being granted to such a ship. But I know a certain old missionary who said, 'Thrice have I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day have I been in the deep; and we must be cast away upon a certain island.' " "For through much tribulation we enter the kingdom of God." With his first commission, Christ "showed Paul what great things he must suffer for his sake."

But shall we blush at seeing an apostle swim on shore from a wreck? No. I thank thee, Lord of heaven and earth, ruler of the sea and the dry land, for all thy mysterious counsels, and especially for this storm and shipwreck. For dreary as is such a scene, thou hast shown that storms are the triumphs of our pilot's art; and that thou canst make them more glorious to thee than any calm. What would halcyon seas and gentle breezes have been, compared with the sublime dignity and faithful interposition of the apostle, amidst the terrors of the deep? A prosperous voyage would have been a vulgar thing, beside this accumulation of dangers vanquished by a Divine hand, and made to demonstrate that, "with Christ in the vessel, we smile at the storm." Who could bear the thought of being deprived of this chapter of "perils in the deep," where we see the apostle of Christ exhibit all that is gentle in meekness, with all that is heroic in firmness, surpassing sailors in nautical prudence, and vanquishing soldiers by more than military courage; conversing with angels, while others saw nothing but horrors; banishing fear from conquerors, now unmanned by despair; honouring the God he served, by confidence, which poured contempt on the gods of all around; and escaping, at last, not only with his own life, but having a present made to his benevolent heart, by Heaven, of all the two hundred and seventy-six lives that were with him, though some of them would have taken away his?

Learn, then, how God, "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will," includes in that counsel concerning the end, which cannot fail of accomplishment, an apparatus of means, among which the principal place is held by a sense of duty, the effect of his grace on his people's hearts, who, amidst storms and dangers, pursue their undisturbed course of obedience to him and benevolence to their fellow-men. Thus, while they take care to fulfil his revealed will, he, by these means,

fulfils his high decrees, and makes "all things work together for good to them that love him." We are the firmest believers in God's decrees, who leave others to meddle, as if they must help him to accomplish them; while we pursue the path he has marked out for us, assured that, in this way, he will attain his end.

And, "so they all came safe to land," Paul, and Luke, and Aristarchus, who expected this, with others who had despaired of ever again setting their foot on firm ground. Hail, shipwrecked saints! We bid you welcome to the shore. Hail, happy omen of your safe arrival, after all the storms of life, at the fair haven of eternal rest! A few more billows still await you; but, again, the waves will toss you onward to your home. There, where tempests never rise, where dangers are unknown, you will look back on the stormy voyage, and adore Him who said, "Fear not; for you must—not before Cæsar—but Jesus, stand"—

"To bless the conduct of his grace,
And make his wonders known."

In the twenty-ninth Lecture we see how truly the signs of an apostle's "perils by sea," are claimed by Paul, whose voyage has cheered many a missionary sent, like himself, "far hence to the Gentiles."

LECTURE XXX.

PAUL AT MALTA.

ACTS xxviii. 1—11.

AMONG the most revolting proofs of human depravity, must be mentioned a practice with which our countrymen were formerly stained, and which is still found in lands called after the Christian name. The inhabitants of the sea-coast sometimes, kindling deceptive fires, produced shipwrecks on their shores, and they who escaped the yawning deep, found their own countrymen, professed Christians, cruel enough to strip, not only the wreck, but their persons, and even to add murder, if it seemed necessary to secure the plunder. We have, this morning, to see the contrast of such conduct in heathens, whose generous treatment of Paul and his companions, will not only rise in judgment against the cruel selfishness of others, but will prove to us the care of heaven to return a thousand-fold into their own bosoms the kindness of those who have pity on some of the most distressed of mortals—shipwrecked voyagers.

Let us consider the opening scene at Malta (ver. 1, 2); the first miracle wrought there (ver. 3—6); and the second, with its train of consequences.

I. THE OPENING SCENE.

I could almost wish that my audience were able to join me in

some such language as this, "Having known what it is to be in a vessel which sprung a leak at sea, and to climb over the rocks, at midnight, to reach a dwelling; and from thence go down to the shore, next morning, to see a wreck; I can form some idea of the scene now exhibited to our view." The discovery which these shipwrecked persons made, and the reception they obtained, were both welcome to our apostle and his companions.

1. *The discovery they made.* Ver. 1. "And being come safe to land, they knew that the island is called Malta."

We have already said enough, perhaps, on the question, which has occupied volumes, whether this was the island which is now called Malta, or another on the coast of Dalmatia, in the Gulf of Venice. There is sufficient evidence that the Maltese may still glory in their isle, for having afforded refuge to a shipwrecked apostle. It is a little spot, that seems to belong to Africa, with regard to soil, and climate, and inhabitants, who were of Carthaginian origin; while, in neighbourhood and government, it was European. In the present day, it is overwhelmed with papal superstition, though under the sway of Britain, which soon snatched it from Buonaparte, after he had, on his Egyptian expedition, taken it, by bribes or terror, from the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, the ancient defenders of the Holy Land; from which being driven by the Saracens, they took possession of Malta. Some of them settled in Clerkenwell, where are St. John's Square and Gate.

The Romans, immediately on their landing, recognised the island, as Malta, with which they were acquainted, and felt themselves at home, though they had been thrown on a part which, from the sea, they could not recognise. The inspiration that enabled Paul to say, "We must be cast on a certain island," left it uncertain what that island was; but if they feared the worst, and anticipated new dangers, perils by land following the perils of the waters, they were agreeably disappointed. Our Lord is better to us than our fears; and when he says, "What I do, thou knowest not now, but shalt know hereafter," we usually find that he designed for us an agreeable surprise. Malta, under the Roman sway, must have been welcome to Julius and his troops, and he knew how to make it welcome to Paul with his brothers, Luke and Aristarchus. We are, therefore, not surprised at

2. *The reception.* Ver. 2. "But the barbarians exhibited

no common philanthropy to us, for, having kindled a fire, they received us all, on account of the rain that was falling, and on account of the cold."

To us, the word "barbarians" conveys the idea of cruel savages ; but the Greeks first, and then the Romans, applied it to those who did not speak their language ; so that, when you read, in the New Testament of "Greeks and barbarians," you should think of those who spoke Greek and those who did not. The apostle says, men who could not understand each other's speech were barbarians to each other. The natives of Malta would be termed barbarians, because their origin would lead us to conclude that they spoke the African dialect of Carthage ; though their conduct, which was the reverse of barbarous, is so commended, as to show that Luke called them barbarians in the better sense. They exercised uncommon philanthropy for the shipwrecked company, and set us an example ; for love to human kind should reign in the breasts of those who "know the kindness and philanthropy of God our Saviour," who took our nature and our place, that he might prove to us that God is Love ; and specially so to man.

Many houses must have been opened to receive nearly three hundred strangers, and the fire they kindled was most welcome in the month of November or December, while the falling rain added to the cold. Of the comfort thus afforded to "those that were ready to perish," we need not speak, for it is sufficiently obvious ; but how much more pleasure must these philanthropists have felt, in the luxury of doing good, than they could have enjoyed in stripping the sufferers to enrich themselves ! Ah, well may we "remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" ! Little did these Maltese know whom they were succouring, or what a jubilee their island would enjoy, to render it celebrated through all future ages ; but "*in* keeping God's commands there is great reward," and it is not necessary to wait for any other reward, to know that "wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." To furnish fire for the poor, who are perishing with cold, is one of the duties of Christians in winter ; and, when sitting by our own hearth, we bless God who has laid up such store of coal in the earth, to mitigate the severity of winter, it would warm our hearts, if we could, with the Maltese, reflect

that we have provided this relief to the poor strangers thrown at our doors. Let us now witness

II. THE FIRST MIRACLE WROUGHT IN THE ISLAND. Ver. 3—6.

Hitherto, all was in the ordinary course of human affairs, except that the barbarians showed humanity that was more than common. But now we have to behold one of those scenes of wonder and beneficence which attended the apostles of Christ. Here all is instructive, whether you consider the occasion, the suspicion, or the alteration.

1. *The occasion.* Ver. 3. This was what would be deemed an accident, or disaster, befalling the apostle ; for “ Paul having collected a multitude of sticks, and putting them on the fire, a viper, from the heat, having come out, fastened on his hand.” They who said, “ *We* cast out with our own hands the ship’s furniture,” did not refuse to gather wood for the fire with their own hands ; and however unapostolic some may think it, we see Paul thus employed, for he was accustomed to work with his own hands. The bundle of sticks that he gathered, contained, unknown to him, a viper, which, finding itself thrown into the fire, leaped back and fastened upon the hand that had unintentionally inflicted the suffering. Our Lord said of his apostles, “ They shall take up serpents ;” and this calamity served but to show his glory.

The previous storm and shipwreck prove that it is in harmony with the plan of our Redeemer to bring light out of darkness. He made, therefore, a viper, which threatened Paul’s life, a means of his usefulness. At first it seemed ominous ; Paul, bitten by a viper, looks to the eye of men criminal. But these are the judgments of what we call barbarians. Christians should learn to “ judge nothing before the time ;” except they judge that “ all things shall work together for good to them that love God.” But mark now,

2. *The suspicion.* Ver. 4. “ But as the barbarians saw the fierce creature hanging on his hand, they said to each other, Absolutely a murderer is this man, whom, saved from the sea, the vengeance has not suffered to live.”

The sentence pronounced by the Moral Governor, after the flood had avenged the “ violence that filled the earth,” shall

never be forgotten—"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." The dread of this retribution is a safeguard to human life. The language of these islanders proclaims the prevailing belief that murder will out, "for God is the avenger of blood."

But our Lord has forbidden us to charge men with crimes, on account of their afflictions. If we know one to be a murderer, we may dread the worst; and when it happens, a man may say, "Verily, there is a God that judgeth in the earth." When, where, and how, God may "make inquisition for blood," we cannot tell; nor should we conclude that he will not grant repentance and forgiveness to a murderer; for the general rules of his government cannot preclude the exercise of sovereign grace.

The heathens supposed that their gods, having a divided authority, quarrelled, and employed it in opposite directions. One deity raised a storm to drown an offender, for whom another interfered as a favourite, who, therefore, escaped safe to land; where the angry god, Nemesis, the avenger, still pursued him, even to death. The Maltese supposed Paul to have escaped one calamity, only to pay by another the penalty of his crime which they pronounced murder. To fall under this suspicion is not pleasant; but we learn here, both to beware of passing those unfavourable judgments by which the best men may be abhorred for the foulest crimes, and also to bear unjust suspicions, under which our betters have suffered, patiently waiting till God shall "bring forth our judgment to the light and our righteousness as the noonday." Excessive eagerness to vindicate ourselves, springs from wounded pride and distrust of God's care. Paul may have seen their suspicions, but he quietly waited, till the event should produce,

3. *The alteration.* Ver. 5. "He, therefore, having shaken off the venomous creature into the fire, suffered no harm; but they expected he would swell, or fall down suddenly dead; and going on expecting, and seeing nothing amiss done to him; being changed, they said he was a god." From one false judgment they rushed to another; as the world now sinks the objects of its suspicion too low, and anon, when the tide turns, exalts its favourites too high. Paul seems to have shown no alarm, no dread of the viper; aware of his share in the promise given by Christ to the other apostles, before this one was called: "In

my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them." Mark xvi. 17, 18. "Behold, I give you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall, by any means, hurt you." The viper, or adder, as Luther calls it, had fastened on the apostle's hand, so as to hang upon it, doubtless, by the teeth; at the root of which is deposited the poison, that flows through a slit in the tooth like ink from a pen, when the pressure of the bite draws it out to mingle with the blood of the wound. But a viper's poison was harmless to an apostle's blood. Our Lord had not promised that apostles should never be shipwrecked, nor that they should never meet with serpents, or be bitten; but as we have lately seen something better than exemption from storms or wrecks; so may we now behold, what is most wonderful, a viper biting and not hurting.

But they who had said to each other, that the apostle was a murderer; for the hand on which the viper fastened must have shed a brother's blood, judged his own blood to be now poisoned, and expected to see a swelling prove the deadly taint; or, the apostle dropping down dead, to become a monument of heaven's vengeance for blood. But, after long looking, and seeing that he had suffered no harm, they, who knew the viper's bite to be fatal, concluded this man, who was unhurt, to be more than a mortal, and said he was a god. The swelling, and the fatality, consequent on the viper's bite, are expressly recorded by the Greek physicians.

Heathen mythology was full of stories concerning the visits of their gods to earth; and, as at Lystra, Paul was called Mercury, so, at Malta, he was thought to be one of those "gods many," whom the Gentiles adored. Thus the supposed murderer, execrated for the sake of a viper, is, through that power which his Lord gave him over all venomous creatures, exalted by the heathen to the rank of a god. This, the apostle, doubtless, abjured, as when he said in Lycaonia, "Sirs, why do ye these things? for we are men of like nature with yourselves."

III. THE SECOND MIRACLE, WITH ITS TRAIN OF CONSEQUENCES. Ver. 7—10.

As that honour which our Lord put upon his apostles, was

not intended to terminate on them, but to redound to his own glory, and the good of mankind ; you now see the minds of the Maltese turned from the miracle wrought for Paul's preservation, to a tissue of wonders for the benefit of the islanders ; first, of the father of Publius, and then of others, whose expressions of gratitude will close this Lecture.

1. *The miraculous cure of the father of Publius* : ver. 7, 8. "But in the regions around that place, there were the grounds of the chief of the island, Publius, who, having received us, entertained us three days, courteously." This person is supposed, by some, to have been the Roman governor of Malta ; but, as no specific title of authority is given to him, it is, with more probability, concluded, that he was merely the chief man, by family, or wealth. His mansion and estates, or farm, as Luther says, were in the vicinity of the spot where the ship grounded ; and, with the humanity which all the islanders displayed, he received into his abode the apostle, and Luke, and Aristarchus ; for to these I refer the words, "He received *us*, and courteously entertained us," as his guests, "three days ;" which could scarcely have been true of nearly three hundred persons, thrown on the shore. Julius, the centurion, however, may have been included, on account of his rank and command ; and he may have informed Publius of the honour which heaven put on Paul and his two friends. Publius was, for his kindness to them, richly rewarded ; for, as you are commanded to exercise "hospitality to strangers, by which some have entertained angels unawares," this rich man found he had received into his mansion one on whom angels waited, and who could repay him with what no money could buy. And what are all the richest estates, when their owner, or one dear to him, lies oppressed with sickness, and drawing nigh to death ?

"It happened that the father of Publius was lying afflicted with fever and dysentery ; whom Paul, having gone in, and having prayed, laying his hands on him, healed him."

With the rich man, who showed such courtesy to strangers, we are not surprised to find his father dwelling ; nor can we wonder, if the affliction of the parent was felt by the son as his own. Though, not knowing that he entertained one who was more than a physician, he would naturally mention the sickness which, to one in the advance of life, might prove fatal. Nor,

perhaps, when he saw the stranger rise, and ask to see the sufferer, did Publius think of anything beyond that courtesy, which he had himself shown to those who were thrown half-dead on his coast. But when Paul entered into the sick chamber, he surprised his hosts, both father and son, by the sound of a prayer, such as they had never before heard. Oh, to have listened to this appeal to the compassion of our Lord,—to have heard this benevolent intercession for those who had shown kindness to men dear to Christ as the apple of his eye! It probably raised expectation of something beyond an attempt to apply more than ordinary means, when they saw Paul lay his hands on the patient. The fiery fever fled at the touch of that hand, the burning frame became cool, and the disordered interior was restored to healthful action. He was well. For Jesus had said, “You shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” This was at the end of three days’ residence of Paul and his companions, in the mansion of Publius; but we cannot suppose that he parted with them, after such a blessing, until they quitted Malta; nor that they failed to speak, or the family they benefited refused to hear, of that Jesus whose glory and grace had been so richly displayed. Would they not ask, and Paul tell, who gave him that power? But who is not struck with the modest reserve with which Luke relates the whole affair? Here is no glorying in having cured the first man in Malta. See now

2. *The host of miracles which followed.* It was natural that “this being done, the rest, who had sicknesses in the island, came. They, also, were healed.” That Lord who had made his servant the honoured instrument of curing the father of the chief man of the isle, refused not the same blessing to all the rest who came, whether rich or poor, whatever their sicknesses were; by which he showed that it was not any peculiarity in the fever and dysentery that gave occasion to the first miracle; but the benevolence and power of “him who forgiveth all our iniquities, healeth all our diseases, redeemeth our life from destruction, and crowneth us with loving-kindness and tender mercies.” Thus, what began with one scene of moral beauty, the humanity of the islanders towards a shipwrecked host, ended with another, the recompense of heaven in banishing disease from their isle, and filling it with shouts of joy. O happy Malta!

Image of that land "where none of the inhabitants say, I am sick!" Here, again, there is no effort to aggrandise the apostle's works of power and beneficence. We are not told how many and how great were the diseases, how important were the persons afflicted, how sudden and effectual the cures, or any other circumstances that might raise our admiration. To Luke, the historian of apostles, miracles were common things. "They all came and were healed."

3. *The gratitude of the islanders.* Ver. 8. "Who also honoured us with many honours, and, on our departure, they put (on board) what things were needful."

"Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart;" but, if what is sown is hidden, when it springs up, the fruit is conspicuous and welcome to the sight. The apostle and his companions came on shore, stripped of everything; escaping only with their lives, were thrown as beggars on the charity of the islanders; and what glory could be seen in such visitors? But, when they had proved that nothing could hurt *them*, though they could cure whatever diseases had seized others, they were transformed from beggars to benefactors; from those who had need of all things, to those who had conferred what was necessary to the enjoyment of all, and what the possession of all things could not obtain. What honours can be too great for those who banish sickness with its sorrows, and restore health with its uses and its joys?

"Freely ye have received," said our Lord, to his apostles; "freely give." They obeyed, and never set a price on their miracles or asked a reward; but did good, "hoping for nothing again." Yet, to every just and generous mind such conduct is so far from quenching gratitude, or forbidding the attempt to reward, in some humble way, the greatest of benefactors, that it serves but to exalt the instruments of heaven's kindness, and to prompt to more earnest endeavours to honour them whom God has thus honoured. To the apostles, who always employed their miracles as the seal of heaven to their message, these honours must have been welcome, as signs of success in their mission; even though they laid their hands on their own hearts, and said, "Give God the glory, we know that this man is a sinner."

For the companions of their shipwreck, the apostle and his brethren may have rejoiced, as these were made partakers in

the benefit. Another voyage was in prospect; and for this the grateful islanders made provision, putting on board whatever was needful for their benefactors, who were not the men to "eat their morsel alone." To save their lives, they had flung their very food into the devouring sea; but now the land provides for their future voyage, teaching them, that he who exposed them to the want of all things, can easily restore all. Let no loss, in Christ's service, grieve you; for he can give you back more, and accompany it with such pleasures as shall make you think of the singular expression in the preceding chapter, "we have *gained* this harm and *loss*."

See, then, how our Lord crowns the severest trials with the richest recompense; the deepest humiliations with the highest honours.

We have heard the infidel scorn the shipwrecked apostle, flung ashore. But now, hear the islanders say that "he is a god." Will that satisfy you, child of unbelief? It more than satisfied the apostle. He rent his clothes, and cried out in alarm, when men would have sacrificed to him as a deity; but knew no alarm, when a viper bit him. Ocean could wreck, but not drown him; serpents could bite, but not poison him; and all his trials led to triumphs. After the storm came the calm; the fury of the sea was expected by the islanders to be mocked, only that vengeance might show it could follow him on land; but here the benevolent man was indulged with the pleasure of doing good, not only to those who had kindly received him, but also to those who had sailed with him. The trials by sea were repaid by the pleasures that the apostle gave, as well as enjoyed, by land.

If some would look down with pity or scorn, on him that swims to shore from a wreck; we ask whether we may not glory in him who lodged with the chief of the isle, there gives, rather than receives, benefits, and spreads blessings through the land, which heaps on him honours that exchange the humiliation of his arrival for the triumph of his departure thence. "Through honour and dishonour," our Lord leads his servants, "as having nothing, yet possessing all things; and, though poor, making many rich." It is thus, Christianity came poor into this world, but is now making it rich; for though its Author "had not where to lay his head," and his

apostles said, "Silver and gold have we none;" the peaceful, benevolent, and energetic influence of a spirit-stirring religion is transforming Christendom into the wonder-working benefactress and mistress of a regenerated world.

Christ's faithfulness to his promises demands our special acknowledgment. This comes out here incidentally, and takes us by surprise, proving that more instances occurred than are recorded. The promise that the apostles should "take up serpents, and that nothing should hurt them," is here only, shown to be fulfilled. Cold and wet from the sea, the man with a charmed life gathers sticks to make a fire, and thus picks up a viper, which, fleeing from the heat, fastens on him. The natives, who knew the consequences they would have suffered from such a creature, think that he whom a viper's tooth could not hurt must be a god; but we call to mind that thus it was written, and say, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one of Christ's words shall fall to the ground till all be fulfilled." "Ye shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover," we more readily remember; for we have more frequently seen it fulfilled. But in how many instances the apostles may have trodden with impunity on serpents, or drunken deadly things, without being hurt, we know not; for their history is not recorded as that of Paul. This seems designed as a specimen that, as it is said, "Ex uno disce omnes;" from one example you may learn the truth of all Christ's words, and trust him to do for us all that he has promised.

Let the horror of murder and the conviction that God will avenge it, be cherished as a part of that "work of the law" which the apostle says, the heathen "show written on their hearts." While avoiding their rash conclusions, concerning men's characters and God's judgments; we should still feel the truth, that vengeance awaits him that sheds another's blood. Our country has lately abounded in this crime, attended with the worst aggravations. Should we not cry, "Deliver us from bloodguiltiness, O God of our salvation"?

How much better our Lord does for us than we should do for ourselves!

They who embark on the perilous deep, naturally wish for a fair voyage, and Paul's friends, doubtless, commended him to that "God who holds the winds in his fist, and the waters in the

hollow of his hand." A shipwreck they would have deprecated. But to this we owe the welcome scene we have now surveyed. Think you not that many blessed the storm which had thrown on Malta such a wreck? When lodged with Publius, these messengers of heaven received his courtesy and hospitality, and his grateful acknowledgments for the restoration of an honoured Father, and blessed their Lord for opening to them a door of usefulness. Ages have rolled away, but the remembrance of the event is fresh and dear to the islanders.

Africa, probably, learned what had occurred at Malta, and began to stretch out its hands to Christ. The islands have taught the continents; and the storms that seem to have wrecked, not an apostle, but a mission at Tahiti, may still teach France the evil of lending its arms to the insidious designs of Rome. The power of Christ may make "the things that have happened in that isle turn to the furtherance of the Gospel."

But, again; we hail the good omen here presented to view. When this body, torn by the storms of sickness, shall be flung away as a wreck, and we shall arrive, a naked, disembodied spirit, on the shores of eternity; friends and honours await us there; for "the righteous are taken away from the evil to come, they rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness." If Malta was made glad by the arrival of these strangers, fairer lands and more numerous inhabitants shall raise the joyous shout, when tempest-tossed spirits shall be presented by Christ "before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, singing, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

Thus ends our thirtieth Lecture, which commenced with what seems to countenance the reflections of unbelief, but affords evidence of a mission beneficent and divine.

LECTURE XXXI.

PAUL'S ARRIVAL AT ROME.

ACTS xxviii. 12—16.

WE are, this day, reminded, that, after the storms of life, we must pass through the floods of death, and make our entrance into the gates of that city where reigns the Lord of the world. Oh, that “an entrance may be ministered to us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.” See, now, his apostle, after the storm that we have witnessed, embarking for his last recorded voyage, and, at length, passing through the gates of that city, where reigned Cæsar, to whom he had appealed, and whose decision would naturally be the theme of the apostle’s reflections and the church’s prayers. Happy shall we be, in our last stage, if, like Paul, we can adopt the language of the Psalmist, “The righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me;” for then, we also may “thank God and take courage.”

The voyage from Malta, the journey through Italy, and the arrival at Rome, let us trace.

- I. THE VOYAGE FROM MALTA is recorded in ver. 11, 12, 13. For they who, destined for the continent, have been cast on an island, must, even if reluctant, put to sea again. Notice,
1. *The embarkation.* Ver. 11. “But, after three months, we

set sail in a vessel that had wintered in the isle, an Alexandrian, with the flag of the Gemini," or Twins. She had, according to the custom of the times, been laid up for the winter months, December, January, and February; during which time, the Maltese, doubtless, heard the Gospel; and though Cardinal Baronius tells of a church formed, and Publius made its bishop, the modest silence of Luke is more instructive than these boasting fables.

As the sign of this Alexandrian ship, chosen for the numerous company, is mentioned, we may be sure there was some reason. Castor and Pollux are not in the original, which has *διοσκούροι*, "Jove's sons, or the lads of Zeus." The Syriac calls them the "Thomases," as that word signifies twins; and Luther says, "The ship had the flag of the Twins." The heathen represented the two sons of Jove, by Leda, Castor and Pollux, as placed in the Zodiacal constellation that we term Gemini, or the Twins. They were the tutelar deities of mariners, who regarded the appearance of *two* stars as a good omen. The sign, or, as English sailors would say, the colours, hung out at the stern, had the figure of two boys and two stars, while the image of the deities was at the head of the vessel, the origin of our figure-heads. Luke may have designed to identify the ship, and make its well-known arrival in Italy an historical note to verify the narrative. But Julius, a shipwrecked soldier, may have chosen this vessel, as saved by its gods from the storms which he had endured, and now hoped to escape. See the apostle and his companions going on board, while the shore is covered by a grateful crowd, who owed their health and power of enjoying the sight, to his miraculous touch, and whose waving hands and joyous voices tell how ardently they wished a prosperous voyage to him, whose visit to their isle had banished sickness, and shown the way to spiritual health and immortal life.

2. *The visit to Sicily.* Ver. 12. "And having been borne to Syracuse, we remained three days." This mention of Syracuse, as their next port, is one of the proofs that they had just left Malta, and not Meleda, in the Adriatic, or Gulf of Venice, which would have led to very different results. In less than forty miles' sail, they came to the capital of Sicily, an island famous for the burning mountain of Etna. Syracuse, the most

splendid city which the Greeks ever founded, had fallen under the dominion of the Romans, who derived from the conquest spoils more vast than even Carthage yielded. Our voyagers had here a view of Italy, their destination ; but whether they landed in Sicily, and made known their heavenly message to the immense population of Syracuse, we are not told ; though as a populous city, wholly given to idolatry, this would have been most grateful to the messengers of Christ. Three days were spent here, probably in consequence of the commercial objects of the Alexandrian vessel. The scenes now presented to the apostle were all in beautiful contrast with the tempestuous voyage which threw him on Malta ; for the port of Syracuse afforded a lovely prospect, while the sight of the Italian shore must have led to solemn musings on the design of his voyage. Ah ! how sweet must it have been to remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ : " Fear not, Paul ; for as thou hast witnessed to me in Jerusalem, so must thou also testify at Rome."

3. The termination of the voyage at the port of Puteoli.
Ver. 13, 14.

" Thence, having rounded, we came opposite to Rhegium, and, after one day, a south wind springing up, on the second, we came to Puteoli."

It is observable that Suetonius, the biographer of the Cæsars, relates that Titus, on returning from the destruction of Jerusalem, took exactly the same course. " He came to Alexandria, and when he reached Rhegium, he arrived at Puteoli in a transport vessel, and thence pressed forward most expeditiously to Rome." Coming round the island of Sicily, from Syracuse to the north-east, they would pass the Straits of Messina, and between the celebrated promontory of Scylla and whirlpool of Charybdis, and have been opposite to what is now called Reggio, which derives its name from a break ; as if the bursting asunder of a part of the continent produced the island of Sicily, for the nearest promontories are only two miles and a half apart. Becalmed for a day, on the next, the south wind, rising, bore them through the dangerous pass, and afterwards along what is called the boot of Italy, to within a hundred miles of Rome.

Puteoli, now called Pozzuoli, is on the north of the Gulf

of Naples, and its name, which signified little wells, was given to it on account of its five-and-thirty natural hot springs, of different mineral waters. It is opposite the celebrated Baïæ, the seat of Cæsarean luxury and vice. Though now fallen before the superior fortunes of Naples, it was a most convenient port, having a Pharos, like that of Alexandria. The arrival of Alexandrian vessels created a great sensation at Puteoli, the inhabitants flocking down to see them, as our countrymen, on the coast, once did to view a homeward-bound East India fleet.

This may have led to the welcome occurrence thus recorded : "Where, having found brethren, we were entreated to remain with them seven days." The news of a vessel containing a crew which had, on coming from Palestine, been wrecked at Malta, led the Christians at Puteoli to make inquiries ; and if they asked Julius, the commander of the troops, he could not fail to tell them of the extraordinary Christian whom he was conveying, as a prisoner, to Rome. This was enough to conduct them to Paul, and to give to him the welcome discovery that he had brethren there, where, perhaps, he little expected them. And who is not surprised to find them ? Did we suppose that Christians were so widely scattered over Italy ? The news ran through the church, swift as an electric spark, "An apostle of Christ, once Saul of Tarsus, now the beloved Paul, who wrote that divine epistle to the Roman church, has arrived. He is on board the Gemini. He is going a prisoner to Rome. Cannot we detain him some days, and hear the word from his lips ?"

As for Paul, and Luke, and Aristarchus ; delighted to find brethren at Puteoli, they exclaim, "Then, the word of the Lord has run and been glorified in Italy ; for, a hundred miles from the church at Rome, we have found another !" To be entreated to remain seven days, was a pleasant proof of the love which Christians bear to each other, and which makes the communion of the saints sweet and holy, in whatever part of the world they may meet. It would seem that the vessel arrived, on the Lord's day, after the worshipping assembly had dispersed, as at Miletus. Seven days, therefore, they stay for the assembling of the Christians again ; as Justin Martyr said, "From all parts of the surrounding country, on the day which

the heathens called that of the Sun, but Christians, the Lord's day, they assemble."

The Greek *παρά*, like the Latin and English *per*, intimates that they were *persuaded* to stay, which the Syriac positively asserts. But who gave them leave? They were not their own masters. Paul was a prisoner, and must obey the orders of Julius. But he who behaved so courteously from the first, must have been still more inclined now to do everything kind to the apostle; and it is probable that Julius and the other voyagers were not indisposed to stay at the baths, a week, before setting out on the journey to Rome.

Should I ask, who is that I hear saying, "How I should have been delighted to be present, when Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus, ministered to the brethren at Puteoli, the next Lord's day;" I should be asked, in my turn, what Christian would not have said, "Lord, it is good to be here! Let us build tabernacles, one for Paul, one for Luke, and one for Aristarchus." And when the public worship was over, and they "talked together of all that had happened by the way," what gratitude and praise arose to their common Lord! But the seven days are ended, and they must come down from the Mount; Julius has issued marching orders, for the next morning; and we must now view

II. THE JOURNEY THROUGH ITALY. Ver. 14.

If this was less dangerous than a voyage on the ocean, it was more fatiguing; since Augustus, in all the pride of empire, is said to have ridden in a cart; for such his silver chariot might be called, ere yet men had invented springs for carriages. From Puteoli, a favourite port with the Romans, Domitian made a road, called after his name; but too late to benefit Paul. As they drew nearer to the city, the Appian Way accommodated travellers, and proclaimed the grandeur of Rome. "And so towards Rome we came, and thence the brethren, having heard news concerning us, came out to give us a meeting, as far as Appii Forum and the Three Taverns, whom having seen, Paul, giving thanks to God, took courage."

The Forum of Appius, on the grand road to the south of Italy, about fifty miles from Rome, is now called Borgo Longo, where was anciently a city of the Volsci. The Christians who met Paul here, were probably of the richer class, who, on the first

intimation of his approach, could command the means of going so far to meet him. But others followed, as far as what we call the Three Taverns ; though the ancient *tabernæ* were cottages, but, like some of ours by the wayside, from selling refreshments, were like taverns. These were nearly thirty miles from Rome, where the high road joined a canal cut across Italy, so that Christians may have waited here, in hope of meeting with the apostle, whether he came by the road or the canal.

Was the sight of the brethren so welcome that it awakened thanksgivings to God, and reanimated the apostle's courage? Remember, he was a prisoner coming to be tried for his life, before Nero, who was now sinking down, from the lauded disciple of Seneca, to the dread tyrant, whose name is a synonyme for all that is frantic, cruel, and vile. More honour to the Christians, then, that one party of them had travelled fifty miles, and another thirty, to meet the minister of Christ, in chains, under a guard of troops. Thanking God for the grace which inspired them with this generous affection and holy daring, the apostle saw that their prayers had ascended to the fountain of grace, that he would give his suffering servant "strength equal to his day." Among these welcome visitors, there doubtless were some of those whose names are in the book of life, if we may so term the Epistle to the Romans, where stands a long list of brethren and sisters, members of the church at Rome, dear to the apostle's heart. Aquila and Priscilla you remember to have seen in that list ; and would you not expect to find them here, after having, "for the apostle's sake, laid down their own necks"?

Paul now took courage. Had his courage previously failed? Why should we be surprised, if it had? Have we not heard him say, when "without were fightings, within were fears ;" and "God, who comforteth them that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus"? After a long voyage and journey, surrounded by heathen soldiers, whose "filthy conversation afflicted his righteous soul," the animal spirits might give way, and the mind sympathise with a weary body. Even the holy excitements of scenes so extraordinary as those through which he had passed, would exhaust the frame and lead to depression, that would be felt more severely as he approached the goal to which he had been tending, for years. But "these things were written

for our instruction, on whom the ends of the world are come ; that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope." If we sometimes need to take new courage, "the same afflictions have been suffered by our brethren." But, to meet one company after another, who had travelled so far to join and own him in such circumstances, was enough to reanimate the apostle, and pour fresh courage into his soul, that was musing on his appearance before Cæsar, and on all the consequences that might follow, to the church and the world, from his testimony to the faith of Christ. New scenes these faithful Romans opened to the apostle's view, to give a happy turn to his thoughts. Did they not tell him, how his letter had instructed, and comforted, and sanctified, and fortified them? How they had grown in grace and the knowledge of Christ, by obeying his instructions? How the "Lord had added to the church daily such as should be saved?" Was he not led to think that his longing "to preach the Gospel to them that were at Rome" would be gratified, and that he would now impart to them "some spiritual gift, that they might be comforted by the mutual faith of you and me"? Had he been able to anticipate only a portion of the usefulness which awaited him at Rome, it was quite enough to rouse his courage.

If such is the consequence of making sacrifices, to meet and comfort the servants of Christ, when labouring and suffering, who would not secure the honour and the bliss? Christ will own the service, when he shall say, "Come, ye blessed, for I was entering Rome in chains, and ye came out to meet me."

III. THE ARRIVAL AT ROME. Ver. 16.

"But when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered up the prisoners to the commander of the camp ; but to Paul it was permitted to remain by himself, with the soldier (that was) guarding him."

At length, some one in this numerous cavalcade, being in advance of the rest, cries out, "Roma! Roma!" and they all turn their eyes northward. The proud Capitol, amidst the seven hills of the city, rises to view. "There it is!" they exclaim ; "the eternal city of Romulus! the mistress of the world!" In the apostle's view, it is "the seat of the empire

which has conquered my country, and boasts that its Jupiter Capitolinus has triumphed over Jerusalem's Jehovah. O God of my fathers, how mysterious are thy ways! Rome, the head quarters of idolatry, receives that Gospel which Jerusalem, the holy city, rejects! Here, Jesus shall have that dominion over the kings of the earth, of which the conquering city now boasts!"

As they draw nearer, increasing crowds are pouring out of the Lateran gate, to see the troops arrive, with their prisoners. Where Hannibal failed to enter, we see Paul, wearing his chain, pass under the massive gate-way, a messenger of that Jesus who shall cast down the gods of the Capitol, and turn the Pantheon into—but I blush to tell, that a new idolatry of saints reigns there. Hear the apostle: "Now has God granted me my wish to see Rome! How different this entrance from that which I once anticipated! But thy way, O God, is in the deep!" Some, who could not go out to meet him, made themselves known as brethren, saying to him, as he passed, "Hail, blessed apostle of the Lamb! welcome to our church, and to our hearts!" "Not ashamed of his chain," nor regarding the "trial of cruel mockings," which the heathen might pour upon them, for avowing themselves "partakers of like precious faith" with him that was going to be tried for it, as a criminal. Again, he would "thank God, and take courage," as he enters more like a conqueror than a prisoner, for a train attends him, far more glorious than the string of captives that graced the triumphal entry of Cæsar.

Arrived at his destination, Julius gladly disburdened himself of his responsible charge, "and, delivering up the prisoners to the commander of the camp," was, perhaps, pleased to find it was Burrhus, a man of excellent reputation. Since the time of Sejanus, in the reign of Tiberius, the prætorian cohorts, or, as we should say, the life-guards, were collected into one camp; now under one prefect, though afterwards two shared that authority; which was of the utmost importance to the life of the emperor himself. It is reckoned a proof of the accuracy of Luke, that he mentions but one, at this time.

Paul, however, was not classed with the other prisoners, to be kept in the prætorian camp; for it was permitted to him to live by himself, though a soldier guarded him, having a chain

fastened at one end to his left arm, and at the other to the apostle's right. Seneca rather humorously comforts a prisoner, by saying, "Your guard wears a chain as well as you, unless you think it is heavier on the right arm than the left;" which it certainly would be, in one sense, as it would hinder the use of the right arm, that is, to most men, of more consequence than the left.

You need not be informed why such a distinction was made between Paul and the other prisoners, committed to the care of Julius. He, doubtless, informed Burrhus that this was no common man, but one favoured of heaven, to whom they all owed their lives, and whose cheering assurance, uttered in the most desperate circumstances at sea, was fulfilled. "Such wonders he wrought in Malta," said the courteous centurion, "that the islanders pronounced him a god. Respect him, and do not let him herd with criminals; for, be assured, he is not one." Nor is it improbable, that Festus sent with this prisoner the best account he could give of the things laid to his charge: "That the Jews accused him of violating their law; but that nothing worthy of death, or of bonds, was imputed to him; so that even the Jewish king, Agrippa, as well as the Roman governor, agreed that he might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed to Cæsar." Burrhus would be justified in making a distinction between this and other prisoners. Luther, therefore, instead of our rendering, "dwelt by himself," says, "live where he pleased;" which interpretation is sanctioned by Greek writers. Paul seems, therefore, to have chosen his own abode in that quarter of the city which would render him most accessible to the Christians, for their improvement; and to others, for their conversion. We shall, ere long, find how important was this abode; "for, when the Highest shall count up his saints, it shall be said of this and that man, that he was born of God there."

"But if Paul was allowed to live alone," the government would not furnish him with a house; and how was he, a poor stranger and prisoner, to obtain one, in an expensive capital, where house-rent was extravagantly dear? They who would travel so many miles to give him the meeting, would take care he should not want a house, if the government would let him live in it. "So Paul dwelt in his own hired house," which, we

shall see, was a large one, where we must, for the present, leave him; not doubting that the intrusion of the soldier, and the weight of the chain, were alleviated by the company of the Christian brethren, who would count it an honour to be the right hand of the man who could not use his own; "because, for the hope of Israel, he was bound with this chain."

Time is left for no more than two reflections: the first is addressed to those who are not Christians indeed, and the second to those who are.

Let, then, such as call themselves Christians, merely because they happen to live where these being predominant, no perils, but some advantages, attend the profession, learn from this passage, what it is to be a Christian indeed. Such a one, because he is united to Christ by a living faith, loves him as the Head; and every other Christian, for his sake, as a member of his body. To meet one, by land or by sea, is a treat, and to enjoy his society, a privilege; so that to join an assembly of them is deemed worth waiting for, a whole week. If we turn not from every other company to enjoy that of Christians, as our brethren, in whatever land we may find them, what are we? "The first fruits unto Christ," that were at Puteoli, soon found out that there were Christians on board the vessel that had arrived in their port; and though one of them was a prisoner for Christ, they, far from shunning him, "entreated that he would remain with them seven days," that the church might enjoy his services. What! hear a preacher with a chain on his arm! Yes; they would reply, much rather than see in our church a governor with a golden chain about his neck. If we do not value an iron chain, worn for Christ's sake, above all earthly honours, we are not the disciples of the Crucified One. Examine yourselves. Can you say, "God forbid, that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"?

To those who are Christians indeed, what lessons of instruction are here! The brethren, who, on hearing of Paul's arrival, went away to meet him fifty miles off, seem to say to us, "Would you travel as far as Bedford to meet and cheer a Christian brother, or minister, who was under a guard of soldiers, coming to London to be tried for his religion? If Bunyan were again a prisoner

there, and were sent up handcuffed for his faith, would you go so far, to bear him company?"

Those who waited for Paul, at the "Three Taverns," ask you, if you would travel as far as Reading, to meet the man that wore a chain for Christ's sake? Would you say, "Welcome, faithful confessor; thy bonds are the chain that binds thee round our hearts?" Would it be to you a luxury beyond all that earth could give, to see that your affectionate zeal revived his spirit, recalled his fainting courage to its former vigour, and made him say, Thank God, I am among Christians again? Would you accompany him through Temple-bar, while the crowd gazed, and, sneering, asked, Is that your minister who wears the chain? Would you hire for him a house where he might best proclaim the Gospel, and, "waxing confident by his bonds, be much more bold to speak the word without fear"? Oh, that to these questions you might be able to give "the answer of a good conscience towards God."

See what it cost to bring salvation to us Gentiles. What sacrifices, labours, journeys, dangers, imprisonments, agonies, torments, deaths!

All this will rise up in judgment against you who have heard, and not believed, the apostolic testimony, to the salvation of your soul. How will you meet this apostle, at the last day, and remember what he passed through, that men should hear, and believe, and be saved; if you stand at the left hand, among unbelievers? How will your own conscience reproach you with despising your own soul, for which others sacrificed their ease, their liberty, their lives?

If you say, We shrunk from the sufferings of religion, and could not bear the cross for Christ's sake; then, I say, See their rewards, their pleasure, their satisfaction, their benevolent delight, in winning souls to Christ; and say whether you will not be convicted of despising the purest pleasures, the most beatific reflections of the men who could say, We take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, for Christ's sake? If to these pleasures, which apostles and martyrs enjoyed, you prefer the gross sensual gratifications of this world, will you not be convicted of a carnal, earthly, depraved mind, that could not relish heaven itself. Cast yourself before that Christ crucified,

whom Paul preached ; believe, and be forgiven ; believe, and give yourself to Christ, as alive from the dead, glad to have your portion with them that love him, whether in their sufferings or their joys.

The thirty-first Lecture being closed with the sight of Paul at the place of his death, reminds us of our approach to the end of this course.

LECTURE XXXII.

THE APOSTOLIC MINISTRY TO THE JEWS AT ROME.

ACTS xxviii. 17—29.

AFTER what we have seen, at Athens, we can tell what to expect in an apostle of Christ, at Rome. He who turned away from the statues, animated by the magic touch of Phidias; from the surprising compass of Aristotle's philosophy; or from the poetic eloquence of Plato; and, wrought up to a paroxysm of holy zeal, "on seeing the city wholly given to idolatry," proclaimed to the Greeks the true God, and "Jesus Christ, whom he had sent;" now that he was conducted to the seat of empire, instead of wandering, as too many, among the monuments of arts and arms with which Rome abounds, turned at once,—to whom?—the celebrated Romans? No; to the conquered Jews, the remnant of Israel, for whose salvation he yearned. Far from sullenly turning away, alienated by injuries, he still felt that the word should be spoken to them first. As all nations flocked to the city which was the seat of empire, you will not be surprised to find there Jews, whose numbers and importance were such, that the government, perplexed and alarmed, had lately banished them; though they were now restored.

Two interviews the apostle had with the Jews that were at Rome; the first, with the leading men, at his own request; the second, by appointment, with the mass.

I. THE FIRST INTERVIEW WITH THE CHIEFS OF THE JEWS, AT THE APOSTLE'S REQUEST.

"It happened, after three days, that he called together those who were the first men among the Jews."

If this note of time signifies, as it frequently does, the *third* day, it displays the unwearied diligence and burning zeal of the apostle. For, on the next day after his arrival, he, though needing rest, yet being visited by the Christian brethren, would be fully occupied in arranging with them the intended meeting, and sending out his invitations, to inform the chief Jews whom and where they were to meet. But as he might not know how soon he would be called before Cæsar, no time was lost in obtaining an interview with the leaders of that people, who were to be his accusers at the bar. They were so deeply interested in the affair, that they promptly accepted the invitation, and came together to his residence, when he delivered to them an address, to which, with their reply, we must listen.

1. *The apostle's address*: verse 17. "Brethren, I, having done nothing contrary to the people, or the paternal customs, was delivered a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, having examined me, wished to liberate (me), since there was no cause of death in me. But the Jews speaking against (it), I was compelled to appeal to Cæsar; not as having anything of which to accuse my nation. On this account, therefore, I have called to see you and converse. For on account of the hope of Israel, I wear this chain."

Knowing all that the apostle had suffered from the Jews, you cannot but see and admire the meekness of wisdom, and dignity of benevolence, which appear in this speech. He says nothing of the murderous plot which they first formed, and which led to his being snatched, by Lysias, from the jurisdiction of the Jews, to be guarded by Romans; nor of the insidious proposal to bring him back to Jerusalem, that they might waylay and kill him. How much moral beauty and Christian grace is there in his declaration, that he had not appealed to Cæsar, because he wished to turn accuser against his nation! He might justly have charged them with rebellion against Cæsar's government, in forming an ambush of murderers, to intercept the man whom Rome had taken into its jurisdiction and care; and, at this crisis, his accusation would have been dangerous, if not fatal, to

the Jews. But he too heartily forgave, even to mention this to the chiefs of his own countrymen ; and much less would he accuse them at the bar of Cæsar. For no provocation must induce a Christian to retaliate injuries ; since the revenge which the Romans said was sweet to the gods, is abhorrent from the law of Christ. To preserve his own life, was the apostle's duty ; to execute vengeance on his enemies, belonged to God. It may, sometimes, be a delicate and difficult task, to keep these two apart ; but Paul shows us, that the best way to accomplish it is, to write injuries in dust, and forget that we have anything to accuse our enemies of.

“ For this cause, as I have appealed to Cæsar, I have first called to see you, the leaders of my countrymen at Rome, that I may converse with you on my affairs, which deeply concern you all. For it is on account of Israel's hope that I have this chain about my arm.” We see him holding up here his right arm, that wore the chain, while the soldier stood by, who had the other end on his left ; as we have already beheld him, before Festus and Agrippa. At this he had no occasion to blush ; for it was not as a robber or murderer that he was chained. “ The hope of Israel ” was a phrase which the Jews could well understand ; for they knew that their nation hoped for a great deliverer, the Messiah, for whom they still look as a conqueror. To this expectation Tacitus ascribes their obstinate defence of Jerusalem. The apostle might well leave them to put their own comments on this declaration, while his bold display of his chain showed them, that he saw no such inconsistency as they would think of between a discovery of the glorious object of Israel's hope, and suffering, even unto bonds, for his sake. “ Hope maketh not ashamed ” of the cross, but inspires a “ glorying in tribulation, when the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, by the Holy Ghost given to us.”

The name of the Saviour was kept out of sight by the Jews, during Paul's trial before the Roman governors, who treated the question of “ a certain dead Jesus, whom Paul affirmed to be alive,” with too much indifference to be disposed to imprison him on this account. But we must remember, that whatever the chief priests put forward in court, their enmity to Christ was really the cause of their fierce persecution of his servant, who, to escape the snares for his life, was compelled to appeal to Cæsar.

Paul appeared at Rome, therefore, as he himself says, in bonds, for "the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our hope."

2. *The reply of the Jews.* Ver. 21. "But they said to him, For our parts, we have neither received letters concerning thee from Judea, nor has any one of the brethren, coming, brought or spoken any evil concerning thee. But we judge it proper to hear from thee what thou thinkest ; for, concerning this section, it is notorious to us that everywhere it is spoken against."

Jews, all over the world, held a communication with Jerusalem, and it might have been expected that they would raise, at Rome, the same cry as had, at Jerusalem, brought Paul into the hands of the Romans: "Men of Israel, help ; this is the man who teaches all men what is contrary to our law and its holy place." Who is not surprised that the chief priests sent no letters to the leading Jews at Rome, to instigate and assist them to secure his condemnation ? They speak, therefore, as if *they* were surprised.

The reasons for this, however, are not very difficult to detect. Festus confessed himself embarrassed, by being called to send a prisoner, without showing the charge brought against him. Both he and Agrippa, the Jewish king, had declared that Paul might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed to Cæsar. Of this the chief priests were aware, and that there was no civil or political charge which they could safely bring. As to the religious accusation, which was the real crime in their eyes, it could not safely be avowed, much less relied on, at a heathen emperor's bar. For, if Paul was of this sect everywhere spoken against, or, in other words, a dissenter from the Jews' religion, that was no crime in the eyes of the Romans, who allowed the conquered nations the liberty of religion. Jews, at Rome, were notoriously dissenters. A Christian church was at that time tolerated in the city ; for the emperor had not yet brought upon himself the stinging censure of Tertullian, "That must be a good religion which so bad a man as Nero was the first to persecute."

They who had nothing which they could safely urge against Paul, knew that the ancients punished false accusations, more severely than our courts, by costs, or giving to an acquitted defendant power to bring an action in his turn. No formal prosecution being brought, seems to have been the cause of Paul's long undisturbed residence at Rome, as a prisoner at large ; and

the leading Jews, probably suspecting the reason, feared the final consequence, and treated him with more respect.

But that none of the brethren who came from Judea should have said any evil of the apostle, seems unaccountable. Yet it is possible that none of those who were hostile to him may have arrived at Rome, since the apostle's last visit to Judea; and formal accusations, not loose calumnies, may be meant.

They, therefore, candidly ask what he thought of this sect, which they mention, not contemptuously, but in the sense of section, or separate party. For wishing to know his mind, they give this sensible reason, that the Christians were everywhere spoken against. With some, this would have been a reason for refusing to hear anything more about it; but, though the Jews well knew that their own religion was thus evil spoken of, it was still to their honour that they wished to hear, from a prisoner in chains, his opinion of the cause for which he was suffering from their own nation.

His sending for them immediately, and his generous declaration that he was not come to be the accuser of his nation, which had forced him to appeal, in his own defence, to Cæsar, probably softened their minds, and produced that reward which was to Paul most welcome. For he that heartily forgives, can enjoy no higher delight than in seeing that he has heaped coals of fire on the adversaries' head, to melt him down to love.

On Christianity, everywhere spoken against, and everywhere triumphant, how much might be said!

II. THE SECOND INTERVIEW, BY APPOINTMENT, WITH THE GREATER NUMBER. Ver. 23—29.

“But, having appointed him a day, there came to him, to his temporary residence, many to whom he, testifying, laid down the kingdom of God, persuading them also concerning the Lord Jesus, both from the law of Moses and the prophets, from morning until evening.” Here we have—

1. *A day well spent by the apostle.* I might, instead of “many” came, have written “the majority,” as the Greek word often signifies; and, when the leading men had agreed to fix a day, to hear Paul's opinion of the new sect, the greater part would be sure to embrace the opportunity of being present, at an interview with such a man, whose letter to the Romans could be no secret.

To the benevolent sorrow which he there expressed for the Jews, I am inclined to ascribe some portion of that candour which obtained for him this respectful hearing. The word that our translators render "lodging," means simply the abode of a stranger, in distinction from that of a permanent resident, without at all determining whether it were a room which we call a lodging, or an inn, or a friend's house, or one hired for him. The latter, which occurs in the thirtieth verse, is the idea intended to be conveyed; and it is shown to have been a large house, for no other could receive the Jews who abounded at Rome. In expectation of such meetings, the Roman Christians, some of whom were wealthy, doubtless, therefore, provided for him a spacious abode.

Here Paul was the only speaker, for a whole day; as the appointment was made, in order to hear what he thought of the much-calumniated Christians. He faithfully delivered his testimony, by laying down the kingdom of God, as we speak of laying down the law, by showing what it is. This was the grand, the one thing which the Jews needed, and to this day, need to know; that "the kingdom of God is not meats and drinks, not rites and forms, not pomps and powers, not cities and armies, not wealth, and honours, and pleasures,—but righteousness, and peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost." Oh, could they but see that a carnal, has no glory in comparison with a spiritual kingdom, they might cease to despise Him who testified before Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world!"

To Paul's testimony to the kingdom of God, the Syriac adds, "While he was persuading them concerning Jesus." For the two themes were so related, that to persuade them of the Messiahship of Jesus, was to testify to the true nature of God's kingdom. How fully the apostle entered into this question concerning Jesus, and how he poured out his heart to them, we are taught by the length of time which he employed; for they met in the morning, and he prolonged his discourse till the evening. Thus their God once more practically said to the Jews, "All day long have I stretched out my hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people;" a text which is quoted in Paul's letter to the Romans. If he made no pause, took no refreshment, through all the day, the earnestness, both of speaker and hearers, must have been intense; but, even on the supposition of some intervals of rest,

the day thus spent proved the truth of the apostle's words, "My heart's desire, and prayer to God for Israel, is, that they may be saved."

But why are we not told one word of what the apostle said to them, on this most solemn occasion? Was it because we have had substantially the same things recorded in this book, where we read what he delivered to the Jews at Antioch, in Pisidia? Or was the whole day's discourse too long to be inserted, and too connected to be abridged? I have sometimes thought that we have it in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which was written from Italy, and certainly contains "the height of this great argument," the testimony to the kingdom of God and his Christ, which the apostle drew out of the law of Moses, and from the prophets.

2. *A solemn close to this day.* "Some, indeed, believed the things that were said." For, while the apostle was deploring the fall of Israel, he said, "God has not cast off his people, whom he foreknew. I also am an Israelite: at this time, as in Elijah's days, there is a remnant according to the election of grace." It was consoling to the lover of Israel, that he could say of some, addressed by him, this day, "Whom I have begotten in my bonds;" it was creditable to the sincerity of these Jews, that they believed the testimony of Messiah's ambassador in bonds, amidst many who despised.

For "some believed not;" and, from the concluding address, we are led to fear that these were the majority. As we are not informed what the apostle said, so neither what others replied; but we are told, that they were not agreed among themselves. For the believers naturally pleaded in behalf of their new faith, to persuade their kindred after the flesh to join them in embracing Jesus, as the promised Messiah, and entering the kingdom; while the unbelievers, contradicting, raised a fierce dispute. Thus was the prophecy of Simeon, in view of the infant Saviour, fulfilled: "This child is set for the fall and the rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be spoken against."

Paul, witnessing their discord, "said one word," or rather thing, that a prophecy concerning Israel was now fulfilled: "Well spake the Holy Spirit, by Isaiah the prophet, to our fathers, saying, Go to this people, and say, Hearing, ye shall hear, and

not understand; and seeing, ye shall see, and not behold; for gross has become the heart of this people, and with their ears heavily they hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should behold with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and with the heart understand, and turn, and I should heal them."

This most awful prediction of the Old Testament, which is six times quoted in the New, is taken from the celebrated vision recorded by Isaiah in his sixth chapter. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all inform us, that our Lord himself assigned this reason why he spake to the Jews in parables: xiii. 14. The evangelist John quotes it, on a very memorable occasion, when our Lord departed and hid himself from the Jews, as God had said by Moses, "I will hide my face from them;" "but though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him, that the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, Lord, who hath believed our report?" Paul had quoted the same words, in his Epistle to the Romans, xi. 8; and now delivers it as his farewell warning. The exposition of the words belongs to the commentator on Isaiah; but so extraordinary frequency of quotation proclaims their vast importance, and teaches the Jews that their rejection of Christ's ministry first, and afterwards that of the apostles, is no argument against the evangelical message; for the prophet whom they most honoured was sent with a description of their nation, which exactly accords with all that Jesus and his apostles experienced. Had not these words been fearfully fulfilled, that day, they would have shaken the Jews to the centre of the soul. For what can be conceived more alarming? Had the sentence been now uttered, for the first time, instead of being a quotation from an ancient prophet of their own; it might have been said by them, that the apostle had lost his temper, and, disappointed of making proselytes, was like "a madman, flinging about firebrands, arrows, and death."

3. *A melancholy parting between Paul and his nation.* Ver. 28, 29. On the apostle's part: "Be it known to you, therefore, that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear." He had formerly roused the Jews to fury, by informing them, at Jerusalem, that our Lord appeared to him, in the temple, saying, "Depart; for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me here, and I will send thee far hence to

the Gentiles." They who had listened quietly, then cried out, "Away with such a fellow from the earth." We might have expected that they who rejected the Gospel themselves would not care who heard it; but the same enmity which spurns Christ would have all the world spurn him too. To the Thessalonians the apostle had written, "You became followers, or imitators, of the churches of God, which, in Judea, are in Christ Jesus; for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us, and they please not God, and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always, for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost." Paul's lofty bearing demands special notice. He had come to the metropolis of the Gentile world, a prisoner, but he had come an ambassador too, though in bonds; for the salvation which God had provided for lost men, through his Son, was sent to the Gentiles. Nor was the success doubtful; for "they will hear." Men might have said, "If Israel, with all their advantages and fond expectation of a Messiah, shut their ears; how can we hope that the blind Gentiles, besotted by idolatry and debauched by its abominations, will hear one in chains? But he that said to the fishermen, whom he made apostles, "Henceforth ye shall catch men;" said, also, to Paul, when called to be an apostle, "I will deliver thee from the Gentiles, to whom now I send thee, to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me." O happy servant, who could say, I am sent with a message to them that will hear! O gracious Master, who soothes the sorrows of one sent to those who shut their eyes, their ears, their hearts, by saying, "Now turn to the Gentiles and proclaim my salvation, for they shall hear!"

On the other side: the parting was stormy. "For he having said these things, the Jews went away, having much disputation among themselves." They had all heard, through the whole day, enough to awaken their consciences, and the believers had become objects of spite, or even envy, to those who

believed not; so that the elements of discord among them had become rife. In other circumstances, a riot would have been raised, and the converts, as well as the apostle, would have been bitterly persecuted; but this would not do at Rome, where Nero reigned, and the prætorian camp was at hand, to pour forth the guards. Nay, the very soldier fastened to Paul's arm was, in a new and better sense, his guard; for a chain became a shield, and they who may, at first, have gloated over Paul's bonds, now changed their minds, and wished he were at liberty, that they might be at liberty to kill him.

Behold the harmony of the Epistles and the Acts of the Apostles.

Though Paley has shown this, in his "*Horæ Paulinæ*," yet not in the instance which I now commend to your notice. Previously to his arrival at Rome, Paul had written a letter to the Roman Christians; and I would earnestly recommend to you the diligent reading of the ninth and two following chapters of that letter, comparing them with this interview between the apostle and the Jews. When he wrote the Epistle, he had no expectation of such a meeting; nor has Luke, the historian of the Acts, made any allusion to the letter. But the two documents throw such light upon each other, that I have been perpetually tempted to quote what he wrote to Rome *about* the Jews, while I commented on what he said at Rome *to* the Jews. Epistolary correspondence is an art which some, not very sincere persons, possess in so high perfection, that with their pen they hide their hearts; and, if you judge of them by their letters, you will be grievously disappointed by their lives, for many who write sweetly act bitterly. But the sincerity of the apostle is seen in the harmony between his letters and his life. The tender compassion which he had expressed for the Jews, was put to the severest test when he was, through them, sent a prisoner to Rome.

Again, observe the Christian spirit exhibited by the apostle of Christ. It is what is called the *beau idéal* of moral excellence. For it combines, in lovely harmony, the opposite virtues of gentleness and firmness; benevolence, which no injuries could quench; and fortitude, which no calamities could appal. This was the apostle of that Lamb who was also the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He, crucified at Jerusalem, commanded his apostles

to preach, in his name, to all nations repentance and forgiveness of sins, beginning at Jerusalem; and now sends to Rome his ambassador, who begins by calling together the Jews, and assuring them that he had nothing to accuse his nation of, though compelled by them to appear as an appellant there.

But, when they believe not, the doctrine, which, in the morning, fell as the gentle rain, and distilled as the early dew, to melt the heart by mercy; in the evening, is exchanged for the thunders which might shake a soul of adamant; for its distant echo, at this day and in this place, harrows up our spirits with grief and terror, making us exclaim, How art thou fallen, O Israel! son of the morning, cast down to perdition, with eyes that will not see, and ears that will not hear, and hearts that will not believe! But the preacher, with calm dignity, unembittered, bent on works of mercy, turns to the Gentiles, sure that the "blindness, in part, which happened to Israel, would be followed by the fulness of the Gentiles." He had appealed to Israel first, not from necessity, because no others could be expected to listen, but from compassion, knowing that his message was sent to Gentiles too, and that they *would* hear.

Learn, here, the character of a true apostolic ministry. It is distinguished by a regard for the inspired Scriptures, for what the Holy Spirit spake by Moses, and by Isaiah, and all the prophets. "To open the book, and loose the seals," and unfold the counsels of heaven, is the glory of the Lamb in the midst of the throne, and this honour he gives to his apostles, that they shall "make known what is written in the Scriptures of truth." That is the true apostolic ministry which accomplishes this end; in despite of the charlatanism which pretends to an apostolic succession, and, shunning carefully the Scriptures, deals in things of which the apostles knew nothing, but that they should mark the rise of the Man of Sin.

But can we, Gentiles, hear the last words of the apostle, on this memorable day, without exclaiming, "Is the salvation of God sent to the Gentiles? and will they hear?" Happy Gentiles! "We gladly take what Jews refuse!" But have we heard—have we said from the heart, "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance"? Has it proved salvation to us? Are we saved from the guilt of sin, being justified by faith, and having peace with

God, through our Lord Jesus Christ?—From the love and power of sin, being sanctified through the truth? Or—I tremble at the alternative—must the sentence be repeated—“Well spake the Holy Spirit concerning you”?

Is the salvation sent to the Gentiles? Then, have we carried it to them. For how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? Have all the Gentiles been able to say, “How beautiful are their feet who bring glad tidings to us”?

Will they hear, and do we refuse to speak? That they will hear, has been proved; alas, then, that it should not have been universally sent to them!

But if, through our tears, wept over the deafness of Israel, we still smile to think that the Gentiles will hear, shall we not also smile, too, to know that the blindness, in part, is happened to Israel, only till the fulness of the Gentiles be come in? Haste, haste, to gather the fulness of the Gentiles, that all Israel may be saved, and we may shout, “O happy Israel, saved at last!”

Thus the thirty-second Lecture closes, ominously for the Jews, to whom the parting warning was given, but auspiciously for us Gentiles, who enter into their inheritance.

LECTURE XXXIII.

PAUL'S TWO YEARS' RESIDENCE AT ROME.

ACTS xxviii. 30, 31.

“AND Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.” Thus ends the history of the Christian church given by inspiration of God. We are come to the point where Luke reminds us of the poet's words:—

“The angel ended, and in Adam's ear
So charming left his voice, that he a while
Thought him still speaking, still stood fix'd to hear ;
Then, as new wak'd, thus gratefully replied :
'What thanks sufficient, or what recompense
Equal have I to render thee, divine
Historian ?'”

Paradise Lost, Book viii.

In one hour we are to review the history of two years—two years of the life of the apostle Paul ; the apostle Paul at Rome, the seat of government over the civilized world.

I. THE HISTORY OF THESE TWO YEARS, DERIVED FROM THE RECORD BEFORE US.

“He remained two whole years in his own hired abode, and there received all that were coming to him ; proclaiming the

kingdom of God, and teaching things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, with all boldness, uninterruptedly."

1. *The time which the apostle spent at Rome.* Two years complete. So long was he kept, by the government, waiting for his accusers. The emperor was too much occupied with his guilty pleasures to be in haste to attend to this serious business, and the officers of state were not authorised to dismiss untried an appellant to Cæsar; while the chiefs of the Jewish nation durst not appear as prosecutors.

Was the apostle kept chained to the soldier all this time? That stricter kind of imprisonment seems to have been adopted, at first, by the discretion of Burrhus; and if we have seen that it lasted till the day when Paul assembled and addressed the Jews, this was so soon after his arrival, that there may not have been time to obtain an order from court to settle the mode of his detention. So many, however, are the incidental notices of his chain, that we must conclude he wore it, all these "two whole years."

So long an abode at Rome, with liberty of action, whatever indignity was put upon his person, was a high privilege. For here was the capital and centre of the Gentile world, to which men resorted from all lands; and now that the apostle of the Gentiles was there, it became to them what another city had been to the world, when it was said, "Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem; and he shall judge among the heathen." These two years were, perhaps, the most important of the apostle's life. Oh, to be able to spend two such years in modern Rome!

"He kept open house, and received all that were coming to him." How numerous these were, we have seen. There were at Rome so many men of inquisitive minds, and abundant leisure, that his house must have been thronged; and every Jew and Gentile that arrived, from all parts of the world, would learn where lived, and preached in public, "this Paul, who had turned away much people, saying they were no gods that were made with hands." As to the Christians, they who travelled so many miles to meet him, would be sure to visit him now, and be followed by many who had not had it in their power to give such proofs of zeal. For his letter to them had poured a flood of light on the minds of the Romans, and warmed their hearts by

coming in contact with his ; and the long list of honoured names at the close of the Epistle, proves that he came not among strangers, but brothers beloved. "He received all that came," with open arms and heart. The church, however, I conclude, continued to meet in its former place ; for though the abode of the apostle is called his own, it is only as we call that our own house for which we pay rent ; since it was "hired," and was, after all, a species of prison, in which the soldier that was chained to him as a guard, had a right to dwell. It was, therefore, far better for the church to continue to assemble in a building that was, perhaps, their own property, and where they were not, as in a prison, compelled to submit to the constant intrusion of a soldier, who, while he was a keeper, was also, whether willing or not, a government spy.

The church, doubtless, assembled under its own pastor or bishop, and other officers ; for though this is not recorded, it is hinted in the Epistle to the Romans, where Paul (chap. xii. 6—8) alludes to their teachers and deacons. But a remarkable reserve prevails, with regard to the church at Rome and its officers, both in this chapter and in the Epistle to the Romans. Was it not ominous ? designed as a *caveat* against the abuse of ecclesiastical affairs and officers in that city ? Of Paul's being bishop of the church at Rome, there is not the most distant hint given by Luke here, or by the apostle elsewhere ; and the notion is the offspring, either of ignorance most pitiable, or of priestly imposition most censurable. The apostles are never called bishops ; for they held a higher office, incompatible with that of bishop or pastor. Apostle signifies one "sent forth" into the wide world, on whom devolved "the care of all the churches ;" while the bishop was the shepherd who was to take care of that one "flock of which the Holy Ghost made him overseer." Again, I say, to call an apostle the bishop of a church, was such a left-handed compliment as it would be to call the king of a nation the mayor of a town.

Had any apostle been bishop of the church at Rome, unquestionably it was Paul ; for the Apostle of the Gentiles was now in the centre of the Gentile world. But, strange to tell, Peter also, and Peter chiefly, has been paraded, as bishop at Rome. Had he been there, he would have been out of his diocese, except among the Jews who sojourned there ; for he

was the apostle—not of the Gentiles, which was Paul's office—but of the Jews. The two apostles shook hands and parted; agreeing, that “the Gospel of the uncircumcision was committed to me,” says Paul, “as the Gospel of the circumcision was to Peter; James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, seeing the grace given to me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship: that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcision.” Accordingly, the last time Peter was seen in this history, he was pursuing his vocation to the twelve tribes, “scattered abroad through Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” At the very time he is said to have come to Rome, and been bishop there five and twenty years, we can show, from the Scriptures, that he was elsewhere.

Nor is it recorded in Scripture, that he ever was at Rome. Numerous circumstances make it incredible, that he had been there up to the time of which these concluding verses of the Acts speak. Paul had, a few years before, written a letter to the Romans, saluting many distinguished persons by name, and no mention is made of Peter. Can we, then, suppose he was there? Paul gave this reason for longing to see them, “that he might impart to them some spiritual gift,” which none but the apostles could communicate. Can we suppose that Peter had been there, for years, and had not made this use of his apostolical powers? Paul arrives at Rome, and the Christians come out to meet him; but not a word is said then, or during the two years he spent there, of Peter. Can we suppose that he was there? Numerous letters were written from Rome, by Paul, to the churches; but not one of them contains a salutation from Peter. Can we suppose that he was there?

I begin to feel as if I had changed places with those who are so loud in their magniloquent laudations of Bishop Peter. For I am ready to exclaim, What! was he such a nonentity, that his coming to Rome was so unimportant, that of this the Divine oracles are dumb; while Paul's voyage and journey thither, form the most conspicuous portion of the inspired ecclesiastical history? Peter there — five and twenty years there — and the Holy Spirit say not one word of it! But Paul's two years there are recorded, as the grand *finale* of the inspired story of the church, that it may rest upon our minds as a memorable fact, with which nothing else shall interfere!

The world is filled with Paul's letters from Rome; but it never hears a word from Peter, except from the church at Babylon! Verily, Peter may say to the Romans, "Save me from my friends."

When I said, it does not appear, from the Scripture, that Peter ever was at Rome, it was to impress you with the conviction, that the figment of his being bishop there, having made the Pope bishop of the world, is utterly incredible to all those who reverence the Scriptures; whose authority is essential to sanction a doctrine of so mighty moment; but of which they know nothing. I have, however, asserted nothing concerning Peter's suffering martyrdom at Rome, which is just barely possible. He may, after the close of the Acts, have been brought to Rome, as Ignatius was, "to die." When there, if he ever was; like Paul, he was an apostle, whose diocese was not a church, but the world; though, unlike Paul, he was not among those who were his special province, which was the circumcision.

But, as if afraid that the episcopate of Peter, at Rome, would not obtain credit, for want of scriptural evidence, popes, thinking it safe to have "two strings to their bow," associated with him Paul. Two apostles, bishops, at the same time, of one church! A stranger might naturally ask, Are there, then, two popes at once? At this, a votary of Rome would start with horror. For popes, like kings, admit no partners to their throne, though they have given to Peter a coadjutor, Bishop Paul. But, for some ages, Europe was convulsed with strife, because there were two popes; one at Rome, the other at Avignon; each cursing the other as an antipope. Why could they not have agreed that one should be successor to Peter, and the other to Paul? Why not parade this, as a sign of their apostolicity; Peter and Paul together again at Rome?

But, while the Christian church went on, under its former guides, whose names, like those at Ephesus, and other churches, are never mentioned; it should not be unknown, that the whole notion of an apostolic see, according to the highest antiquity, is violated by the papacy of Rome. For the ancients, by an apostolic see, understood a church that was founded by the personal labours of an apostle; such as the church at Philippi.

But that Paul did not found the church at Rome, is certain;

for he had never seen it, when he wrote the Epistle to the Romans; and that Peter did not, is as certain; for he was engaged in Syria till near the time when Aquila and Priscilla, members of that church, were driven from Rome, by Claudius. The "strangers from Rome," who were at Jerusalem, at the day of Pentecost, seem to have carried the first tidings of the Gospel to Rome; and, therefore, it was no apostolic see, even if Peter and Paul, on a visit, presided there; for this apostles did, at many places which are never called apostolic sees.

It may naturally be asked, What gave birth to the notion of the ecclesiastical supremacy of the see of Rome? I answer, the civil supremacy of the city. When Constantinople was built by the first Christian emperor, and made a new Rome, its bishop fancied he ought to rule; but as Peter was called the prince of the apostles, it was thought a good plea for retaining the superiority at Rome. But enough of this mystery of iniquity.

2. *The employment of the apostle.* It was that of a *herald proclaiming*, as the original signifies, the kingdom of God. For the Sovereign of that kingdom sent forth his apostles through the world, to proclaim his ascension to the throne, and to call upon all nations to bow to his sceptre. Our Lord Jesus himself proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven was at hand; and now it was announced, that "God has exalted him, with his own right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour; King of kings, and Lord of lords."

A dangerous theme at Rome, under the eye of Nero! But it should be recollected that the apostle had already taught the Roman church obedience to civil government. It was, therefore, the more safe and easy for him to proclaim that "the kingdom of God is not meats and drinks, but righteousness, and peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost." The Romans had learned from the Stoics, and especially Nero, from Seneca, that a good man is a king. Pilate, having received Christ's good confession, "I am a king," showed no jealous alarm, but said, "I find no fault in him." Such a kingdom, as Paul preached, could create no fear of its being "hurtful to governors and kings." Civil government will be rendered more easy and more safe, as it certainly will be more equitable and more beneficial, by the universal prevalence of the

kingdom of God. But had Paul's proclamation of the kingdom included such a domination as popes afterwards set up at Rome, he would never have been permitted to act as its herald, where Nero reigned. A far nobler kingdom occupied the apostle's mind; the dominion of truth in the soul, the triumph of peace in the conscience, the reign of holiness in the heart, the sway of benevolence in the life.

But he was "teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ;" as he declared to the church at Corinth, he came with no intention to "make known anything save Jesus Christ, even him that was crucified." "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ," he says to the Romans; "for it is the power of God to salvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also; for I am a debtor to the Greeks and the barbarians, to the wise and the unwise." How truly Paul said, "We preach Christ crucified," may be seen from the strain of his letters written during these two years. While he was on this theme, a prison was to him a paradise; as our pulpit is to us, when we see the glory of the Lord, the sacrifice of his Christ, the merit of his blood, the perfection of his righteousness, and the greatness of his salvation; and can tell you all our hearts, and see in your eyes, that you hear, believe, love, and adore.

That he spake "with all boldness," or freedom, we are assured; and how much importance he attached to this, we learn from his asking the prayers of the saints, "that I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak, declaring the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds." A chain on his arm, and a soldier by his side, would have intimidated some men; and either struck them dumb, or made them speak tremblingly, as if ashamed of their theme. But he that views it as Paul did, is made by it a hero. "Be not afraid of their faces," said God to his prophet, "lest I confound thee before them." It is a shame to us, to speak of the Lord Jesus as if we were ashamed of him. Some have argued against conceding to the faithful their Scriptural rights, and in favour of settling ministers by the magistrate's mace, and defending them by the constable's staff or the soldier's sword; that *our* principles make the people inso-

lent tyrants and the ministers timid slaves; while they say their practice makes preachers bold, and the people obedient. If this were true, it would be a more weighty argument in their favour than any I have yet heard. But when the effect of principles is the question, the appeal must be to facts. To the pulpit and the press I appeal. Where is the boldest preaching heard? Whose are the most faithful sermons printed? Where are the Boanerges, sons of thunder? Where the downy doctors, whose "drowsy tinklings lull the distant fold"? Where do they preach from the heart to the heart? Where read elegant essays to ears polite?

Let facts speak and decide. The reasons, too, are obvious, and at hand. Men who voluntarily attend and support a ministry upon principle, do this because they know they have souls to be saved; and would thank no man for flattering them: they could do that for themselves. They know that the minister whom God calls and owns, he makes faithful, in view of the judgment-seat, at which he must give account; and more depends on the spirit than on the circumstances of the preacher. A coward will be a coward; and a hero, a hero, anywhere and everywhere. And, while Christ lives and reigns in the church, it will always be more easy for a faithful preacher to find fit audience, than for auditors to find faithful ministers. Hearers are more easily made than preachers.

But now for the other side. Let facts again speak. We have lately seen men, armed with human laws, and endowed with tithes and taxes, play the tyrant, and expect the people to bow submissive slaves. But what has been the result? The people have shown, that, if you tread upon a worm, it will turn. They have spoken—they have acted. Episcopal mandates are revoked, and the highest authority says and unsays, forbids and permits, till the mandate amounts to nothing, and things return to their old course, as the people willed they should. For they that would do as they will, must will to do as they ought.

There is but one word of the Acts left waiting our notice, for, though our version contains four, "no man forbidding him," in the original there is but a single adverb, which might be rendered "unhinderedly," if such a word could be tolerated. Oh, happy apostle! To spend two whole years in the capital of the world, amidst an ocean of immortal souls, proclaiming the kingdom of

God, and teaching the things that concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all boldness, without hindrance! Could he ever do this before? Did he feel the burden of the chain on his arm, when his tongue was thus at liberty to tell all his heart? Was the presence of the soldier any offence, while he hindered not the proclamation of the heavenly herald? Where we might have expected the greatest hindrance, at the seat of government, under the eye of the emperor, with the attendance of a soldier, there the apostle found none. For everything is to us what God makes it. He can give us freedom, where we should expect restraint; an open door, where there are many adversaries; the greatest usefulness, where the enemy hoped to arrest our progress; and the most welcome pleasures, where everything seemed to threaten pain. "Commit thy way, then, to the Lord; trust him, and he shall bring it to pass."

II. THE HISTORY OF THESE TWO YEARS, AS GATHERED FROM OTHER PARTS OF SCRIPTURE.

Luke wrote, doubtless, under the eye of Paul. If two years are so briefly recorded, omitting so much of what we know from the Epistles to have occurred; we may safely conclude that the whole book is but a *specimen* of the Acts of the Apostles, and of the great things which the Lord wrought by them, to set up his kingdom in the earth. But further information we have from other sources concerning Paul.

1. *His personal ministry at Rome we know, from the Epistle to Philemon, to have been successful.* For that letter was sent to beg forgiveness and acceptance for Onesimus, a slave, "whom I have begotten in my bonds," says the apostle. As he supposes an injury done by the slave to his master, we cannot doubt that it was a delicate hint of what the apostle knew to be a fact. "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee anything, put that to my account. I will repay thee." A pilfering slave flees from Colosse to Rome, where, the Latin writers say, the filth of the earth was accumulated, to hide itself in the mass of moral ruin. There Onesimus hears of Paul, whom he had known at his master's house; and, having nothing else to do, steals toward the hired house, which he found open to all comers. Though not wishing to be seen, he wished to see, and, attempting this, could not but hear. The well-known voice struck him, and he exclaimed,

"The man who converted my master, and can work miracles too ! Perhaps he can tell my crime, and punish it too ; it may be, by striking me dead !" At this moment, Paul repeats his testimony to the Romans : "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men !" The slave trembles, and says, "That was intended for me." "After thy hard and impenitent heart thou treasurest up wrath," says the apostle. "What shall I do ?" groans out the slave. "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance," cries the preacher. "Oh, that goodness," says Onesimus, "which threw me into the hands of such a master as Philemon, where I heard such a man as Paul, and now has lead me, as a blind man, by an invisible hand, to hear him again ! Should not such goodness lead me to repentance ? But how can I be saved ?" At this moment, Paul proclaims, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "I do believe !" exclaims the penitent ; "surely God has forgiven, for my agitated soul settles down in peaceful confidence." He goes and tells his case to Paul, who thanks God, and sends him back with a letter, as a beloved son, "whom I have begotten in my bonds." It is only from this letter that we know the fact ; and how many such events may have been concealed, for want of such letters !

Other effects of the apostle's imprisonment, on the Christians at Rome, we know from the Epistle to the Philippians. "Many of the brethren of the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." That they should previously have been timid, was natural ; for it has been concluded, from history, that the Christian church had been dispersed by Claudius, the last emperor, when Aquila and Priscilla went to Pontus, and met Paul. After this emperor's death, the church re-assembled ; but not without trepidation, which increased, as the character of Nero was unfolded. But now they say, "See how boldly Paul proclaims the kingdom of God, and testifies of Jesus, and no one hinders. Is he a hero in chains, and are we cowards at liberty ?" They put on strength, and become "much more bold to preach the word without fear, and with hearty good-will, knowing that Paul is set for the defence of the Gospel."

But some, strange to tell ! preach Christ from envy and strife, supposing to add affliction to his bonds. These seem to have

been Jewish believers, of the Pharisaic order, zealous for the law, which they would impose on the Gentiles, and prejudiced against the apostle, as if he opposed the law, because he maintained the liberty wherewith Christ makes us free. They preached Christ with their own legal additions, thinking this would vex the apostle, who was not at large, to meet and counteract them. Such were some of the primitive Christians, at Rome! It is not Scripture, then, but tradition, that makes antiquity the standard of perfection. Yet these equivocal Christians, these envious and spiteful preachers, are not anathematised, as fit only to be silenced by apostolical authority; but are declared to have missed their aim, "for I rejoice that Christ is preached, in every way." For if the truth be preached, this will save; though the preachers be lost.

"But the things that have happened to me have turned out to the furtherance of the Gospel; for my bonds in Christ are made known in the palace, and in all other places;" and they of Cæsar's household believed, and sent their salutations to other churches. As a state prisoner, the apostle became notorious, and occupied a more favourable position for giving publicity to the Gospel, than if he had come, as he intended, a voluntary itinerant preacher. Would the Romans then have come out in crowds to meet him? Would the palace have heard of him? Would Cæsar's household have become believers? Such results made the apostle exult in the things that happened to him, and should teach us, instead of fretting at the frustration of our plans, to trust Him who "leads the blind by a way they know not," to make "all things work together for our good." Paul asked not in vain, "Pray that I may come to you with joy, by the will of God, and with you be refreshed." The generous Philippians sent supplies to the apostle, which he, as generous, in his epistle to them gratefully owns.

2. *The letters sent to the churches abroad.* Letters! What wonders! What miracles! What mighty moral instruments! We transfer our souls to paper, and send our mind, our heart, across lands and seas, to commune with other souls on the opposite side of the globe. This instrument of mental communication was first consecrated to the purposes of Divine revelation, in the Christian Scriptures, and the Acts of the Apostles introduce that part of the New Testament to our notice; for they show a letter

sent from the apostles at Jerusalem to the Gentile converts, and afterwards exhibit Paul, the principal inspired letter-writer, communicating with the churches, through this medium. Having brought him to Rome, where he wrote so many of the epistles, the history leaves him.

The following epistles were written at this time and place, though their exact order is neither certain nor important. The order in which they stand in the New Testament, is no guide ; for the epistle to the Romans was not the first, but was placed at the head, either for the sake of keeping it in juxtaposition with Paul at Rome ; or on account of its doctrinal importance ; or rather, perhaps, because the complete collection was made at Rome, which had the most commanding communication with all parts of the world, and naturally placed its own first.

The epistles to the Thessalonians were the first that were written ; and the next, those to the Corinthians ; then that to the Galatians ; after which comes the one to the Romans, written from Corinth.

The epistle to the Ephesians stands first among those sent *from* Rome, in which he says, "I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, desire that you faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory ;" and, chap. vi. 20, 21, he informs us that Tychicus had come to him.

Next comes his epistle to his beloved Philippians, the first-fruits of Europe ; from which letter we have already learned the effects of his bonds upon Cæsar's household. This seems to have been written towards the end of his captivity, when he trusted he should shortly come to Philippi. Chap. ii. 24. He thanks them for their present to him, which was, like themselves, liberal, and a fragrant offering to God. Chap. iv. 18.

The epistle to the Colossians follows, in which he rejoices over his sufferings for them. Chap. i. 24. This seems to have been sent along with that to the Ephesians ; for Tychicus was the bearer, and Onesimus was sent with him, as a faithful, beloved brother, "one of you," says the apostle. "Luke, the beloved physician," salutes them ; and Paul adds, "Remember my bonds."

The epistle to Philemon, at Colosse, was sent by Onesimus, his slave, converted at Rome ; and in this also the apostle expresses his expectation of deliverance. Ver. 22.

These epistles have been said to smell of the gaol; but as Bunyan's Pilgrim smells of Bedford gaol, when, with him, we stand on the Delectable Mountains, and scent the spicy gales of Paradise. Ah! who would not rather have been Paul, writing these letters, with a chain on his arm, than Nero, perpetrating his orgies at Baïæ?

How the Acts of the Apostles came to a close here, with some appearance of abruptness, we know not. Some suppose that Luke, advanced in years, removed, on account of illness, to Asia, where he died. My own opinion, perhaps I ought to say conjecture, is, that the book was not designed to be a complete history of the church or of all the apostles, but of the transference of the church from the Jews to the Gentiles, chiefly by the labours of the Apostle of the Gentiles, who is followed to Rome, the head of the Gentile world; and thus an introduction is given to the epistolary part of Divine revelation, which fully unfolds the doctrine of Christ. The history of the church is henceforth to be gathered thence, and from the prophecy called the Apocalypse, or Revelation of John.

But can we turn from this last verse of the Acts without solemn reflections? We leave Paul, not in gaol, indeed, yet a prisoner, though at large. No grand *finale*; nothing like what a writer who had recorded his conversion, Peter's deliverance, and Christ's ascension, in order to deceive by dazzling splendour, would have suffered to close the book.

But the whole history bears an indelible stamp of sincerity. Its chronology and geography can bear investigation; and the secular history of the period proves the truth of the sacred.

For detection of imposture, if there had been any, numerous opportunities were afforded; but the writer never stops, we may say stoops, to prove the truth of what commends itself to the understanding, the conscience, and the heart.

We are compelled to feel that we have been conversing with God, and with his faithful servants; and that if the history records the first struggles of our religion against the world and its worship, these are the struggles of light against darkness, of truth against error, benevolence against malignity, and holiness against sin.

The heathen were not ashamed to close the history of Socrates with a narrative of his trial, condemnation, imprisonment, and

death by the hemlock-juice; and must not every Christian exult in the apostolic history, though it leaves us with an account of two years' imprisonment, and says nothing either of release or of the martyr's crown. Sufficiently joyous was the epilogue to the work, in assuring us that years of religious liberty were afforded to such a Christian herald as Paul, in such a city as Rome.

The last Lecture closes our course with a strange combination of labour and rest; rest from the fury of the persecutor, afforded to the man who knew nothing so fatiguing as idleness, and no rest so sweet as the service of his Lord.

APPENDIX.

To one who has formerly lectured on the history and preaching of Christ, with which the Christian history commences, it may be permitted to close this volume by glancing back at its contents; pursuing the subsequent history of the apostle Paul, and of the church, to the end of the canon of Scripture; and giving a sketch of the Christian history, as extended by prophecy, to the consummation of all things.

I. A RETROSPECT OF THE INSPIRED HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

The laying of the foundations of the churches, by the wise master-builders, the apostles, as recorded by an evangelist, is the only inspired, and, we may almost say, the only real, ecclesiastical history. By shedding forth his Spirit, to renovate the souls of men, our Lord fulfilled his promise, to build his church upon a rock; and against it the gates of Hades have not prevailed. The high moral character of the first believers is exhibited as a proof of the effects of a living faith in Christ; and, as the poor of this world are heirs of the kingdom, the first officers chosen were deacons, for the distribution of the charities of the rich, and the relief of the poor.

The persecutions endured by the apostles were the consequence of the envy and alarm created by the miracles which sealed their testimony; and the blood of the first martyr was a signal for the removal of those who were charged to "preach repentance and remission of sins, in the name of Jesus, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." From the bosom of the Jewish, came forth the Christian church, to embrace the Gentile world, among whom the Jews have now been long dispersed. Paul, the zealous instrument of Jewish persecution, was made the successful apostle of the Gentiles.

One apostle having been taken away by a violent death, which threatened soon to remove them all; elders, overseers, or bishops, to watch over the

souls of believers, were appointed in every church. The choice of its officers was referred, by the apostles, to the suffrages of the faithful, the parties most worthy of that trust. But no Christian priesthood, distinct from that of all believers, was instituted; for, the other priests mentioned in the Acts, are Jews, or heathens, with whom they, who now call themselves priests, take their lot. Voluntary contributions are the revenues of the Christian church. The worship of the churches has been left undefined, except that the first, the Lord's-day, the Lord's Supper, the baptism of believers and their households, prayer, and the ministry of the word, have been recorded in the sacred history.

Of Peter, and of the other apostles, except the Jameses, the elder of whom Herod killed, and the younger received Paul on his last visit to Jerusalem; though much has been said, little is known. For, the Acts, far from unduly magnifying the apostles, passes by the majority of them in silence, leaving us to extend to them all the question of one, "Was Paul crucified for you?" Is this, and is the absence of all claims to a priesthood, no mark of sincerity?

But there is one point, on which the silence of the Acts seems strange; and the single instance in which it breaks that silence is most important. The origin of the Gospels; the writers, the times, the places, the occasions, the designs, are all questions of the deepest interest, on which we long for further information. To no one of the four has the evangelist set name; and it is only by the introduction, that we know the writer of the Acts had previously written a Gospel. As to that by John, it is not mentioned in the Acts, because it was not written till afterwards. But can the same be said of Matthew and Mark? A German, who is a neologian, and something more, (or less?) admitting the Epistles to be a genuine correspondence, affirms the Gospels to be so much later productions as to have no historical character. He has been acutely answered by Dr. Dobbin, in his *Tentamen Anti-Straussianum*, which is here mentioned, because it proves the Gospels to be their own witness,—a principle of the highest importance, and most exalted worth. Besides the omission of the writers' names, and all other information concerning these histories of Christ; the silence of the Acts seems designed to leave the Gospels, like the works of creation, without any signature, in order that they may tell their own origin, and say, "The hand that made us is divine."

We are now finishing our review of the first history of the founding of the Christian church; written—when? Manifestly, not long after the events recorded; obviously, not deferred till the occurrences must be dimly seen in the distance, when the means of investigating the facts were for ever lost. For the writer speaks as of things of which he could say, "Quorum pars magna fui!" He says, "*We* set sail; *we* came to Philippi." He closes his narrative with Paul's two years' residence at Rome; after which, the writer seems to have gone into other parts, and is supposed to have soon died. This history was known from the earliest days of Christianity, and the first Latin father appeals to it, as well authenticated. All this convinces us of the truth of the story, to say nothing of the collateral evidence from Roman history, which shows a Christian church, at that time, in the capital of the world. But, all who have carefully gone through this history of our religion, must have been penetrated with its internal evidences of sanctity and truth.

Turn we now to another consideration, the bearing which the book of the Acts has on the Gospels. Can we suppose that a history of the church was composed before any biography of its Founder and Head? Is it credible? Is not the supposition absurd? Who can have noticed the manner in which the apostles made the testimony of Jesus the spirit of their ministry, without feeling that Christ's history ought to have preceded that of his church? Their sermons are full of Christ, his person, his life, his death, and especially his resurrection, but without giving a continuous verbal history; and their stay was, in most places, so short, that their hearers could not have been made sufficiently acquainted, by memory, with the person on whom they were, in future, perpetually to dwell. Who can suppose that they who found one so prompt to record the origin of the churches, which were but the streams, should not have previously received the more interesting, and essential, history of Christ himself, the fountain, to which, not only the churches, but the founders, owed their religious existence? Is not this incredible?

How much more natural and rational is that order which the exordium to the Acts records, as a fact; that the Gospel was written first, as the proper, and even necessary, commencement, without which, nothing recorded in the Acts can be understood. For, as I have considered the scope of the Acts to be an introduction to the Epistles; so we may say, the Gospels were an introduction to the Acts.

Luke, therefore, shows what was the order of nature and of reason, when he says, "The former treatise, or account, I have written, of all that Jesus commenced doing and teaching; and now I come to relate the execution of the commission he gave to his disciples to preach Christ through the world." This is little else but a declaration, that the history of Christ should be known before that of the Acts can be understood. If it be said, Luke merely affirms that *he* wrote the Gospel first; we ask, for what reason? For anything peculiar to Luke? or for the same cause that must universally operate, the necessity for recording the life of Christ as an introduction to the history of the church? His language is so far from depriving his exordium of all further application, that it gives to our inference additional force. Wherever the apostles went, there were the same reasons for early furnishing their hearers with a Gospel, as Luke felt for sending one to Theophilus.

This necessity led "many to undertake to set forth such a declaration" as constitutes the Gospel. The want was generally felt. And can we imagine that the apostles did not perceive and supply it? The two previous Gospels, I suppose to have been among the many of which Luke speaks; the rest may have consisted of extracts from these. While the whole college of apostles were in the heart of Palestine, and the life and death of Jesus were fresh in the memory of men, the extensive preaching of the original witnesses, among such auditors, might supersede the necessity for a written Gospel. But when the contemporary generation began to die off, and the memory of the facts to grow faint, what we now call a Gospel became necessary; and Matthew, who specially records Christ's warning of the unbelief and doom of the Jews, first prepared for his departure, by leaving a written testimony, his Gospel. His previous office under the Roman government may have rendered him, in various ways, most fit to commence the mission to foreign lands.

The order of the Gospels which has obtained, is probably the natural result of their date. All that has been said of the time and place of the composition of Mark's Gospel, may be, like what one of the manuscripts says of its being written in Latin, mere fable, invented at Rome, and mixed up with the mistake which Hug defends, that the evangelist was John Mark, nephew to Barnabas. As this person was evidently with Paul or Barnabas, and not with Peter, in the early part of the mission to the Gentiles, it has been deemed necessary to throw the composition of the Gospel to a later period, that of Peter's supposed second visit to Rome. Of the companion whom Peter calls "Marcus my son," I have already spoken, and may observe, that his Gospel appears to have been written under Peter's guidance, as his testimony to his countrymen, when he went from Antioch into the East. Its Hebraisms are also Syriasms, the language of Antioch; and it is abridged where Matthew enlarged.

That of Luke embraces the advantages of the two former, as he himself possessed the qualities of a Jew educated as a Greek physician, whose life was usually that of a traveller. But we know that he was the evangelist before he wrote the Acts, at the end of Paul's detention in Rome. It has been justly observed, that Theophilus, to whom, if we may not say *for* whom, he wrote, was probably an Italian, if not a Roman; for he who is accurately informed concerning other places, is, as soon as the narrative applies to Italy, supposed to need no such information. If, then, either of the Gospels was intended for the Romans, it was not Mark's, but that of Luke, which forms the introduction to the Acts.

What has been said of the necessity for the early origin of the Gospels, applies not to that of John, which, evidently supposing the pre-existence of the others, is not so much history, as theology, contained in the discourses of our Lord. That most consummate divine and commentator, Lampe, thinks the Gospel of John was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, to prepare both Christians and Jews for that event, in the latter days of Nero, in the year 66 of the vulgar era, or about thirty-two after the ascension. The earliest date of the Gospels best accords with the uncertainty that attends the subject; for the churches that found a Gospel written before their conversion would know, and even think, little about its date, while a later date would make the new thing an object of notice and observation to believers. This is confirmed by the mass of concurrent testimony concerning the last, the Gospel by John.

To some, the Acts may appear to close before the church was formed. For no priesthood, no hierarchy, no councils, no ecclesiastical canons, no civil establishments, no tithes, no sacred buildings, no liturgy, no prescribed form of service, can we find in the Acts. To us, however, Luke appears to have recorded the essence of all the Christianity that ever was, or ever will be, in the earth; congregations of the faithful, each one having its bishop and deacons. "To them were committed the oracles of God," which an apostle declares to have been the chief distinction of the ancient Jewish church. When, therefore, to congregational churches were committed Epistles which form so large and important portions of the Christian Scriptures, all who receive these as Divine, pay homage to the congregational principle. For, whether they know and intend it or not, they who receive the Epistles to the churches of

Thessalonica, Philippi, Colosse, Corinth, and Rome, as the word of God, acknowledge such churches to have received the highest recognition of their independent church state; so that the aggregate of these constitute the church of God upon earth. Rome itself parades, as its *argumentum palmarium*, the assertion, that we receive the Scriptures themselves on the testimony of the church. But that a certain Epistle was sent from Paul to the church at Thessalonica, must have been known by the testimony of that church; and the Romans, as well as all other churches, must have *received* that testimony; for it would be absurd to call any but the church at Thessalonica its original source. When men shall open their eyes to this honour which Christ has put upon the distinct churches of the saints, they will cease to profane sacred things, by giving to the indiscriminate mass of a nation the name of the church. The very composition of the New Testament, consisting, as it does, in a great measure, of letters to independent churches, is a perpetual testimony to the true Christian polity, which was like that of Greece, where a collection of free states formed a contrast to the monarchies which ruled the rest of the world. But it should never be forgotten, that the elements, rather than the order and rites of the churches are presented to us, in the Acts, as all-important. Whenever it shall be practically recognized that a church is a congregation, and that it must be composed of faithful men, we may hope to see such bodies peacefully arranging all other things according to the word of God.

II. THE HISTORY OF PAUL, AND OF THE CHURCH, AS FAR AS THE SCRIPTURES EXTEND.

1. *The apostle's history.* Some have supposed that Cæsar gave Paul a hearing, during the two years which we have reviewed, and that he refers to it in his second letter to Timothy. Would Luke have failed to record an event so important, if it had occurred during the period of which he wrote? But, no prosecutor appearing, Paul was, at the end of the second year, allowed to depart, though probably under that surveillance, which the Roman Government exercised over the suspected, wherever they went.

The apostle's subsequent history is utterly uncertain. The hints which we seem to gather from Scripture are of doubtful import; and tradition is often manifest fable. It has been concluded, that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written at the end of the two years' imprisonment; and, therefore, that the apostle went to Palestine, on quitting Rome, as the close of that Epistle shows he designed. But he had previously intended to take Rome, on his way to Spain; and Clemens Romanus, one of the earliest bishops at Rome, and the first of the fathers, says, Paul travelled to "the farthest bounds of the west," which indicates Spain—the Straits of Gibraltar being considered the western boundary of the world. Clement may, indeed, have merely inferred that the apostle went thither, because he had said he intended; but the father may also have known that, when the apostle was at liberty, the same reasons which induced the design, led to its execution. When in Italy, no field was more accordant with the apostle's spirit than Spain. Of the assertion, that from thence he came over to Britain, I say nothing.

Some have thought that, after two years, he returned to Italy, and then wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, who had fallen into severe persecutions,

after the martyrdom of James the Just, which made it desirable to fortify them against the temptations to apostasy. If "Timothy had then been set at liberty," and not merely *dismissed* by the apostle, the young man must have fallen into bonds, at Rome, during Paul's absence. From the concluding verses to the Hebrews, the apostle may be supposed to have speedily followed his own letter; going first to Cæsarea, to which his epistle seems to have been immediately sent, that the Christians there might prepare him a lodging, and hand the letter forward to the disciples, wherever they might be found. His visit to Cæsarea, the seat of the Roman government, may have been designed to show his enemies that he had the authority of the empire for being at large. That he went up to Jerusalem, I cannot deem probable.

Early in the year 64, he is supposed to have sailed for Crete, now called Candia, the most western of the Greek Isles; saying to Titus, "I left thee in Crete," i. 5. Thence he seems to have passed over to Ephesus, where he left Timothy, to "abide still, while he went through Troas into Macedonia" (1 Tim. i. 3), whence he wrote to Titus; and at this time, probably, he paid his last visit to his most beloved friends at Philippi.

At Nicopolis, in Epirus, he is thought to have been, when he wrote his first letter to Timothy: Titus iii. 12. Some have concluded that he extended his labours so far as to plant churches in Dalmatia, whither Titus followed, 2 Timothy iv. 10; and, at the end of the year, was apprehended in Asia, and sent again to Rome. But some of the Romanists affirm, that both he and Peter came voluntarily to Rome, to succour the Christians, who were now suffering persecution under Nero. In the summer of the year 66, he is thought to have written these words, "At my first answer, no man stood with me." The general abandonment, of which he complains, may be no reflection on the Roman church, for his first answer may have been when he was apprehended in Asia; but, when he wrote to Timothy, after having been "delivered out of the mouth of the lion," he says, "I am ready to be offered up, and the time of my departure is at hand."

For Nero, having, in his mad freaks, set Rome on fire, that he might, by rebuilding it, rival Augustus; and from the summit of his palace gloated over the sight, fiddling, and singing the verses of Homer on the burning of Troy, found that this was more than his subjects would bear: he attempted, therefore, to lay the blame on the Christians, whom he destroyed with horrible cruelties. During this storm, Peter and Paul are said to have been brought to Rome, to join the army of martyrs. The confusion and uncertainty which attend the narratives of their deaths, may be accounted for, by the terror and disorder of the times, by the multitudes who fell, and the impossibility of paying due attention even to the most eminent saints. Peter, as a despised Jew, is said to have been crucified, the Roman punishment for slaves. But who can believe that, at his own request, he was fastened to the cross with his head downwards, as unworthy to die like his Lord? The fierce persecutor would not respect, if Peter had uttered, such a wish.

Paul, however, we are told, was, as a Roman citizen, beheaded, which was deemed a more honourable death. As executioners were anciently skilled in severing the head from the body at a stroke, this was a less painful death than any other; and, to a weary labourer, who, longing "to depart and to be with

Christ," could say, "O death, where is thy sting?" doubtless this was a welcome stroke. If I were to say, "Nero, intending a punishment, conferred a boon;" you might reply, "A greater and better than Nero said to the martyr, 'O man, greatly beloved, go, rest from thy labours, and thou shalt stand in thy lot at the end of the days, for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.'"

And were I to bid you drop a tear over the headless corpse of the apostle, would you not reply, "We may weep for ourselves, and the church deprived of his life and labours; but tears would profane his corpse. Rather let us sing over it:—

" 'Corruption, earth, and worms,
Shall but refine this flesh,
Till the triumphant spirit comes
To put it on afresh.' "

To have lived such a life, and to have died such a death, will spread over eternity the joys and glories of a thousand lives!

I can scarcely persuade myself to repeat the fables which some have invented, but of which Rome itself is half ashamed. The head, when severed, giving three bounds, and the *trei fontane*, three springs of water issuing from the spots which it touched! See, rather, his spirit, bounding from its clay prison, winging its flight, with attendant angels, to the presence of Christ, to hear the welcome voice, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

2. *The history of the church to the close of the canon of Scripture.* The next grand event, after the persecution by Nero, who soon after died, a suicide, was that which our Lord so pathetically predicted—the fall of Jerusalem, and the destruction of the Jews as a nation. After Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, rose and fell in quick succession, till the empire was transferred to Vespasian, who had been sent against the rebellious Jews. He left his son, Titus, to finish the war and destroy the temple and city, as Josephus largely narrates, but no inspired writer mentions; for the kingdom of God had been taken from Israel, whose fates were now left to profane records. The Arch of Titus, which contains the representation of the spoils of the temple carried in triumph under it, and the amphitheatre of Vespasian, built by Jewish captives, and dedicated by the slaughter of myriads of them in conflicts with wild beasts, still say to all who visit Rome, "So true are the words of Jesus Christ!" The next persecution was by Domitian, who, succeeding his better brother, Titus, banished the only surviving apostle, John, to Patmos, where he wrote the Revelation. John returned to Ephesus; but he waited not long ere Christ came to call him away, in old age, by a peaceful death. His Epistles and Revelation close the canon of Scripture.

A history by anticipation, however, or a prophecy of the future condition of the church, being given to the last apostle, this Revelation claims our notice.

III. THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH, FROM THE CLOSE OF THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE TO THE END OF TIME, AS PREDICTED IN THE REVELATION.

The Revelation being the only infallible continuation of the history of the

church, and reaching to the end of time, a blessing is pronounced on him that readeth. Some general understanding of the prophecy may be acquired, even by those who are incompetent to the minuter details. Three things are clear : first, that the church of Christ was to pass through vicissitudes, sufferings, and conflict with the world ; next, that it was to witness a great apostasy from the purity of the faith ; the true character of the Christian religion being exchanged for a worldly, proud, persecuting domination, in which, what ought to have been a pure virgin to Christ, would become a harlot, committing fornication with the kings of the earth, and drunk with the blood of the saints, while all the world wonders, and the true church flees to hide itself in the desert ; and, lastly, that, after all, the whole world shall become the kingdom of Christ—a Paradise restored. For, as the Revelation was given “to show the things that are to come to pass,” the concluding chapters exhibit, not heaven, as some imagine, but a heavenly kingdom upon earth.

The whole future history of the church is prophetically divided into seven periods ; for which reason it was addressed to seven churches ; in so many epistles, which describe the *internal* condition of the real church, because the actual condition of these seven was an image of the future states of religion.

The *external* lot of the church is set forth by seven *seals*, which, being loosed, open so many portions of a great roll of a book, containing so many pictures of future events.

The conditions, or fortunes, of the kingdoms of *earth*, connected with the church, are represented by the sounding of seven *trumpets*, which announce the fall of earthly dominations ; as the priests sounded the fall of Jericho, before the ark of the Lord.

But, as these eras draw towards a close, seven vials of wrath are poured out upon the apostate church, for its destruction, to make way for the triumphs of true religion.

From this outline of interpretation arise several observations.

First observation. The *internal* state of the church, scarcely admitting such pictures as the seals and trumpets introduce, required a more intellectual description. The apostolical Epistles had already described the interior, or religious, state of Christians, and thus given the clue to our interpretation. The scope, or design, of the Revelation had been distinctly announced, “to show the things that were to come to pass ;” which forbids us to suppose that the epistles are merely historical. The slight differences found among the churches well accord with the design to exhibit real religion, which has always an essential identity, and is but circumstantially varied by times and seasons.

Second observation. The *seals* opened by the Lamb, expose to the reader the interior of so many sheets of parchment, each sealed at the top, but all forming one roll, or volume, containing the external condition of the church. The apostles were solicitous to know when Christ would restore the kingdom to Israel, which, being as yet sealed up, it was not for them to know. The Lamb, therefore, now unseals, and calls us to see and to hear what the Spirit says to the churches ; for he was promised to show things to come.

Third observation. Trumpets had been employed to sound the downfall of that city which stood in the way of Israel, on entering the promised land ;

and the imagery of the Revelation is taken from the Old Testament. The seventh trumpet clearly explains the design of all the preceding; for it brings voices from heaven,—“The kingdoms of *this world* are become the kingdom of our God and his Christ.” The other trumpets, therefore, announce the shaking of these kingdoms, which are to pass away, that the kingdom which cannot be shaken may remain. The first trumpet announced what came to pass shortly after our Lord gave the Revelation; and thus we are taught by the first and the last, that the others predict the events of intermediate eras.

THE FIRST APOCALYPTIC PERIOD. From A.D. 96 to the great Decian persecution, A.D. 250.

§ The first epistle to the church at Ephesus exhibits an excellent state of religion, verging to declension from the first love, which is threatened with the loss of its church-state. History shows the prophecy fulfilled.

§ The first seal opened to view Christ going forth on a white horse, the symbol of victory. History records, at this period, external progress, but internal decline towards the end.

§ The first trumpet sounded for a storm on the Roman empire most connected with the church; like that at Gibeon, which overthrew the Canaanitish kingdoms. For the calamities which came on the empire, Christians were blamed and persecuted, under Decius; while the fathers acknowledge that the loss of the first love was punished.

THE SECOND APOCALYPTIC PERIOD. From A.D. 250 to A.D. 365.

§ The second epistle sent to the church at Smyrna, whose works, tribulation, and poverty (though it was rich) are made the symbol of the second era of the real church, which by its afflictions was enriched; and is warned against the time when golden sacramental cups would be in the hands of wooden priests. The ancients, who originated this expression, tell of the extreme depression of the church at Smyrna. “The blasphemy of those who say they are Jews,” may be a prediction of Julian’s attempt to restore Judaism, or a warning against the rising fondness for Jewish pomps and priesthood. The ten days’ tribulation, the fathers applied to ten persecutions of the whole Christian church.

§ The second seal opens to view a rider on a red horse, taking peace from the earth. Though Constantine closed a suite of horrible persecutions; his own family, that was a part of the external church, was full of discord and blood. Arianism and Julian both destroyed the peace of the outward condition of the church.

§ The second trumpet, Rev. viii. 8, exhibits a burning mountain cast into the sea; the Pagan-Roman empire, as an extinct volcano, expiring with Julian, and the unity and strength of the whole destroyed by the division into Eastern and Western.

THE THIRD ERA, OR PERIOD. From A.D. 365 to the end of the 7th century.

§ The third epistle was addressed to the church at Pergamos, by him from whose mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, to warn against forsaking his word for tradition. The literal Pergamean church dwelt where Satan’s seat

was, among idols; and is the type of the true church amidst a paganized Christianity. Antipas, a literal martyr, is the image of the faithful, who would be antipapal, against a Pope, as Pontifex Maximus, head of the Nicolaitans, or conquerors of the laity, by priestly claims to superiority.

§ The third seal opened to view a black horse, and he that sat on it had a yoke, and there was a cry, "A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine." Dark and funereal was the character of this era. The yoke of bondage was laid on the souls of men; but as the same word means the beam of a balance, *marketing* seems to predict a venal ministry. Not scarcity was proclaimed, for the prices are those of plenty. But the provisions of the soul, the services of religion, are proclaimed for money, which was supposed to open heaven's gate. Jewish tithes were introduced into the Christian church, and a scale of prices for pardons was published.

"See that thou hurt not the oil and the wine," may mean that the great consoling doctrines of religion were not yet denied or lost, even in the external church.

§ The third trumpet exhibits a star, Wormwood, falling on the waters, a third part of which were made bitter. The trumpets relate to the kingdoms of the world, which are connected with the church, and Mahomed, or his helper, Sergius the monk, and the effect of Islam on kingdoms connected with the church may be designed.

THE FOURTH APOCALYPTIC PERIOD. From the beginning of the 8th century, when temporal dominion was acquired by Popes, to the 12th.

§ The fourth epistle is addressed to the church in Thyatira, and is long. The Son of God proclaims his eyes like flames, and his feet like fine brass, to teach that he saw through the outward show of religion, and in righteous ways would purify his church. An adulterous woman, like Jezebel, is arraigned, as debauching the church. Some living woman at Thyatira may have done mischief there, like Jezebel, in the deepest apostasy of Israel. The faithful few are warned by the Searcher of hearts, that they might hold their integrity, as the Vaudois did.

§ The fourth seal, broken, reveals a pale horse, on which sat death; hell, or hades, following; so that a fourth part of the earth is destroyed by sword, hunger, pestilence, wild beasts. A deathlike state of the external church might be a sufficient exposition; but I think that hades, or the world of spirits, is introduced, to show that the future world, especially purgatory, would give a character of gloom and terror, destroying souls.

§ The fourth trumpet's sound is followed by the darkening of a third part of the sun and other luminaries, so that earth was deprived of a third of its light. These were the dark ages, when the earthly powers connected with the church were hoodwinked by Popes; and Christendom was desolated by that semi-pagan thing called Chivalry, and by the Crusades, by which Popes cozened kings. This period is longer, and less capable of being defined.

The next eras are preceded by a voice crying, "Woe, woe, woe, by reason of the three trumpets which are yet to sound!" so that the following are called "Woe trumpets," *i. e.*, to the earthly kingdoms.

THE FIFTH PERIOD IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH, from the 12th Century to the Reformation.

§ The fifth epistle is to the church at Sardis, from him that has the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars; to give the Spirit, and raise up ministers, called stars, and angels of the churches: Rev. i. 20. The faithful few are re-proved, and are warned to hold fast, lest Christ come as a thief. That our Lord was about to pour out his Spirit, and raise up reformers, as stars in a dark night, Ranke, in his History of the Popes, shows to have been so clearly indicated, that, if there had been no Luther, there must have been a Reformation.

§ The fifth seal opens to view ancient martyrs' blood crying for vengeance, which is deferred till the rest are slain by the Inquisition, after which the *external* state of the church would be less afflicted. Rev. vi. 9.

§ The fifth trumpet begins the woes on the kingdoms around the church. Of the fallen star, I am unable to speak; but the Saracenic and Turkish locusts brought woe on the nations, as their own mad crusades did, for more than a century.

THE SIXTH PERIOD, from the Reformation to a time which, perhaps, has not yet arrived.

§ The sixth epistle to the church at Philadelphia, expresses, perhaps, brotherly love to have been the character of that church, as well as the import of the name of its site. No reproof is given to it; and the internal state of the real church, after the separation from the corrupt, is not only approved, but rewarded, by opening a door of usefulness. The boasts of the Jews, in the literal Philadelphia, seem to prefigure those of the *soi-disant* Catholics. Our Lord says, "I come quickly;" and promises to keep his church from the approaching calamities, as a pillar erect, on which is written, "Jerusalem," the mother-church. Gibbon exhibits Philadelphia like a pillar amidst the desolation of the Turks; but the purest communions have been unshaken amidst the late convulsions.

§ The sixth seal opens so terrifically, with the wrath of the Lamb on the throne of Zion, against the powers and dignities of the world, in external relation with the church, that it is best seen in Rev. vi. 12 to the end.

The French Revolution was probably but the beginning of the end; and the external relations of the church are destined to great change.

A mystic number, the square of twelve, the number of the tribes of Israel, are sealed to safety, amidst the wrath of the Lamb.

§ The sixth, which is the *second woe-trumpet*, sounds, to loose four angels at the Euphrates, and calls forth myriads of horsemen. The river refers us to the East, where the Turks have crushed the Christians, who are evidently becoming dominant in Asia. But as this woe to the kingdoms of this world, in the vicinity of the church, is not yet fully experienced, the "words may be sealed up to the time of the end." The Reformation commenced what the following period will complete.

THE SEVENTH PERIOD, to which neither beginning nor end can be assigned, if the preceding statements are true.

§ The seventh epistle, being sent to Laodicea, reproved for lukewarmness, reminds us, that the epistles came first, because the internal state of religion precedes in time, and gives rise to, external providences. The commencement of the Reformation was distinguished by fervour, compared to which, our present state is lukewarm; though what, in other circumstances, had been excellence, is, with our superior advantages, censurable defect. "As many as I love," says Christ, "I rebuke and chasten; be zealous; behold, I stand at the door:" sovereign grace often rouses the church from declension to prosperity; and the final triumphs of religion will cause us to look back on our state with shame.

§ The seventh seal opens with silence in heaven, for half-an-hour, as long, perhaps, as all the preceding visions occupied. The external state of the church, having been rectified in the former period, is now peaceful.

§ The seventh trumpet proclaims the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of Christ, who has put down all rule, authority, and power. To a vanquished *world*, it is the last woe-trumpet.

During the time that the three sounded, seven vials, or cups, of wrath were poured out on the seat of the beast, or Antichristian empire, which we have seen smitten to the dust.

Of the various episodes, I can say but little. The death and resurrection of the two witnesses may be yet to come. The red dragon exhibits the persecuting power. The harlot-church, on the seven-hilled city, will at last be crushed by the kings whom she made drunk with the golden cup of fornication. New Jerusalem descending to earth, and all things made new, are such a heaven upon earth, that they have been mistaken for the heaven of heavens.

A mystic period, expressed in several forms, amounting to twelve hundred and sixty days, point to so many years. The figurative language of the book extends to its numbers, as well as images. "Apostasy," says Paul to the Thessalonians, "is beginning, and will be ended by Christ's glorious coming," which the event proves to require ages; and the Old Testament taught the mention of a day for a year. The *woman*, fleeing into the wilderness, could not be supposed to live twelve hundred and sixty years, and must, therefore, be said to be hidden so many days.

What a demonstration of human depravity is this history of Christianity! A religion of truth and purity, love and loveliness, transformed into an impudent imposture, a harlot of kings, a fiery dragon, drunk with martyrs' blood. Into a church founded by prophets and apostles, on Christ the corner stone, built up by the testimony of Scripture, are brought monstrous absurdities, pagan pomps, human laws, that have overlaid and buried the inspired word out of sight. Pretended disciples of Him who died for enemies have overwhelmed the Christian name with the foulest disgrace—the shedding of blood in torrents by the infernal court of the Inquisition! The doctrinal difficulties of our religion are nothing to those of its history; which compel us to flee to the Revelation, where they are foretold. How loudly are we reminded of the original testimony of Scripture, that, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God!" What folly, what desperation, is there in trusting to the name, the outward form, the profession of the

Christian religion! Alas! by such Christians earth has been most bitterly afflicted, most foully polluted; by such the deepest hell is peopled. Nothing but the religion as it is recorded in Scripture, brought home to the heart by the Spirit of its Author, inspiring the peace and joy of reconciliation with our Maker, and transforming us into the image of our divine Redeemer and benevolent Exemplar, can save us from our fallen selves, and render us what Christianity and Christians were designed to be—blessings to the world.

The passing away of the clouds which hung over the history of our religion, teaches us to “judge nothing before the time, till the Lord come.” Seeing how impotent is the mere profession of the Christian name for good, and how mighty for mischief; we cease to deplore its narrow limits, and adore the counsel which reserved its full expansion, the execution of the commission to go into all the world, for that era when the Spirit of truth and holiness which first descended at Pentecost shall come on all the earth, and fulfil the promise to all who bear the Christian name, “As ye were a curse, so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing.”

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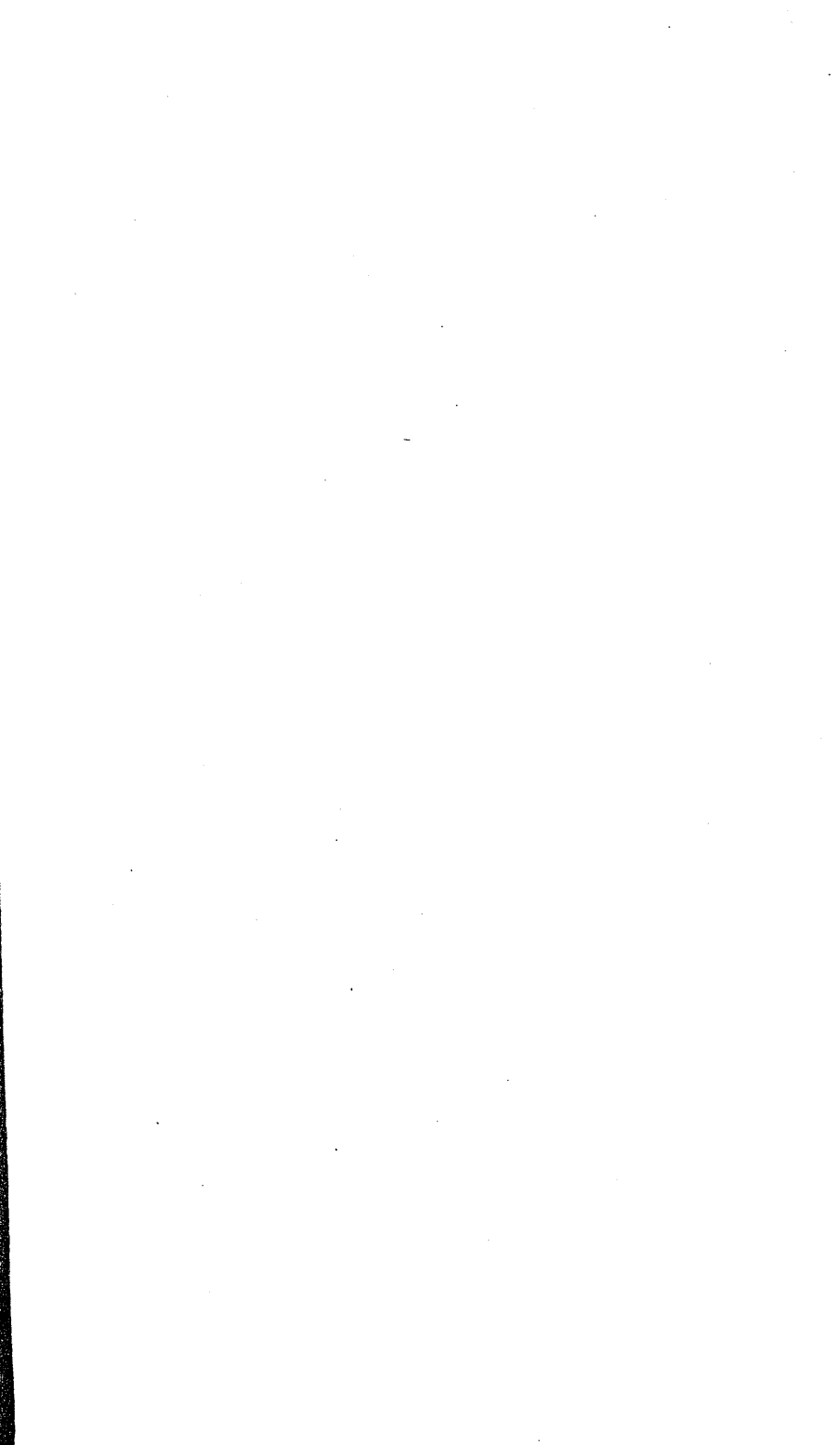
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